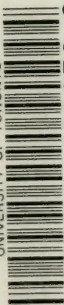


B
Ohl

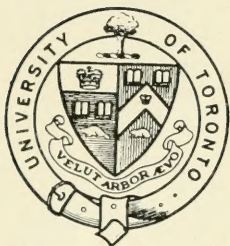
THE DANCER OF SHAMAHKA

ARMEN OHANIAN

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO



3 1761 01436073 9



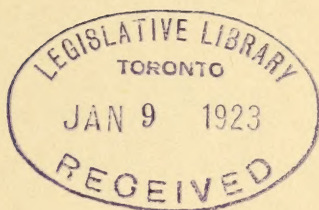
Presented to the
UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO
LIBRARY

by the
ONTARIO LEGISLATIVE
LIBRARY

1980









Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2008 with funding from
Microsoft Corporation

The Dancer of Shamahka

54768

The Dancer of Shamahka

by Armen Ohanian



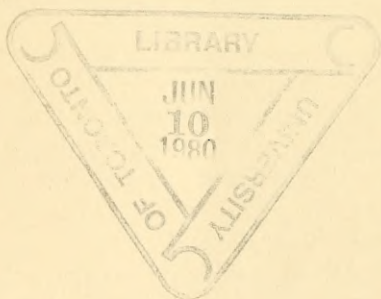
I danced in the fire—
Behold me, the Flame!
I danced in abysses—
Behold me, the Wind!

54768

Jonathan Cape
Eleven Gower Street, London

CT
1908
062
A313
1922

First published 1922
All rights reserved



Printed in Great Britain by Butler & Tanner, Frome and London

Letter to Armen Obanian from Anatole France

PREFACE

DEAR MADEMOISELLE,—

I thank you very much for having allowed me to read these pages from your memories.

You have put into these descriptions and tales the same charm that exhales from your eyes and your gestures. I do not know what subtle art is hidden beneath your perfect simplicity, but you have known how to paint with a word the dawns and the sunsets of the Caucasus, and to reveal a thousand secrets of Nature and of life.

It is delicious to see you as a little child with your sisters, Anahide, the mathematician; Heguine, who knows in history only the adventures of the djinns, the peris, the houris, and the little Katarine, destined to die without having sinned. You enrapture us, dear Armen, with your revelations of your “minds like those of little wild animals.”

And what a miracle of *naïveté*, your disputes with old Nani as to the superiority of Christian faith over the religion of Mohammed!

You lead us into scenes which can never be forgotten: the drowsy school of Toutouse, the services of Holy Week, the festival of Easter, when one eats kebab of mutton, the meeting with the handsome peasant, and that solemn night of watching when, as

P R E F A C E

you have said, it seemed that the moon was broken to fill the assembly with its light. How much that contains of poetry and of truth ! How beautiful it is !

Do not refuse, dear mademoiselle, the felicitations and the thanks of your old friend,

ANATOLE FRANCE.

CONTENTS

ARMENIA

	PAGE
ZERGUERAN	9

Dawns of the Caucasus—The seven souls of a cat—The visit of the dandansaze—The Evil Eye and little Katarine—The sacred month of Mouhareme—Easter in Armenia—Mingula dances on the tombs of the saints—Evening—Night at the miraculous springs—The bride of the sculptor of amber—The dance of the Mongolian dervishes—An evening with the priest Ter-Barsegh—The tale of the fakir and his Onyx—The death of Katarine—Ter-Barsegh describes the creation of man.

SHAMAHKA	51
--------------------	----

The love of King Dandouk for the Queen of Shamahka—Ker-Galassi, Mountain of the Virgin—Mary of Magdala—Alikh speaks of love and Zoroaster—My father's library—Sunday teaches the meaning of eternity—The wrath of the mountains destroys Shamahka.

BAKU	68
----------------	----

The shores of the Caspian Sea—We enter Baku—The nightmare of Russian schools—Prince Galitzine, the Archangel—The masseur's bombs—Rahim, the Tartar lover—The Cossack terror—Massacre—Rahim risks his life—The disguised Armenians—I watch in the night—New massacre—The Cossacks charge—The Tsar gives his people a constitution.

PERSIA

RESHT	95
-----------------	----

My unknown husband—A bridal journey to Resht—The house of Assatour-Khan—I study the duties of an Armenian wife—The Evil Spirits seize me—The civilized uncle takes me to the bazaars—The dervish reads the stars—The nuptial bath—I meet my husband.

CONTENTS

	PAGE
TEHERAN	120
The little palace of the vizir—My husband goes to save the world—Death—General Sasso-Tates is generous—The little eunuch describes Europe—The love of Queen-of-the-Crowns—The house of Envar-ed-Doule—Persian nights—Prince Sword-of-the-Empire calls—The strange birth of Prince Sword-of-the-Empire—The wise man Seied-ed-Dine consults the omen—The omens do not deceive—The Queen makes me beautiful—The love of Bahman—The real life of Persian women—Djende and the saintly fakir—The marriage of little Suhun, the leper—The merchant of brocades—The French Princess and the Palace of Forty Mirrors—The Shah gives audience in the palace of Dar-Bar—A summer's night with the courtesans of Teheran—Shah-Abdul-Azim celebrates Mouhareem—A Christian in the mosque—The Queen amuses herself—A comet comes out of the west—Prince Mes-Saltaneh sings his last song—The little Shah is unhappy—The daughter of a djinn—I dance for the Shah—Scandal in Persia—The story of Mougdoussi-Khanoum—I go on pilgrimage.	

TOWARDS JERUSALEM

ACROSS THE CAUCASUS	205
A night in the desert—Rahim's last gift—Knarik dies for love—The career of Eyes of Fire—The strange history of Georgia—The Dance of the Swords for the Viceroy—The merchant of swords gives a banquet—The jeweller's dream—Schiller in Akoulis—A train to the Black Sea.	
CONSTANTINOPLE AND GREECE	222
I speak of the rope in the house of the hangman—Nasle Khanoum outwits me—Annette knocks at my door—A night of the Bosphorus—Greece.	
EGYPT	237
The catacombs—How Semiramis loved the King of Armenia—The bestiality of civilization—I see the Sphinx by moonlight—The heart of Pharaoh—Our dream of the civilized countries—The sacred dance of maternity—I dance for the two Khedivas—A civilized Armenian patriarch—The wager between Pasha and Bey—My Neopolitan count—The Englishmen tell me of music-halls—Farewell to Asia.	

Armenia : *Zergueran*

AH yes, I remember my childhood, fresh and rosy as the dawns of the Caucasus, from which the people of my country must have stolen the blinding colours for their scarves and sashes. I remember the peaks of blue and white slowly unveiling themselves from the heavy clouds. I remember the yellow deserts emerging and stretching far, barren and sad, quivering at the foot of savage cliffs like pride subdued by barbarous masters. I remember the small Tartar villages clinging like eagles' nests to the brink of abysses, the red citadels, the Byzantine domes of churches, the slender elegant minarets. I remember the chants of the muezzins saluting the rising sun and mingling with the grave ringing of Christian bells to glorify the same God at the same hour. My ears still hear the songs of birds and the metallic tinkling of ornaments worn by the Armenian women. Veiled in red and carrying vases on their shoulders they come and go from the distant spring, hastening to offer their husbands, with the smile of morning, the freshness of water in a copper jar.

"The world awakens," said our old Tartar nurse, rubbing together her wrinkled hands.

Ah yes, indeed, old Nani, we saw the whole world awakening before our eyes. But to-day I do not know even the awakening of my nearest neighbours, shut like me in these immense prisons of brick blackened by smoke, and I see neither the sky of morning nor the sky of night.

ARMENIA

The earth awoke. And beneath the cascade which fell from the cliffs to water our gardens, I was mingling my happy shouts with the cries of my sisters, plunging in the white foam. My mother, smiling to see us so joyous, gently coaxed us into the house.

But soon, clad in light garments, red, yellow and blue, with Turkish slippers on our feet and white turbans on our heads, we were climbing like monkeys up the fruit trees. The servants begged us in vain to descend for the morning tea; we were happy, and sitting on the branches we bit into the juicy pears.

Then came the beautiful silhouette of my mother in her Georgian veils, with all her bracelets accompanying so prettily her grieved gestures. Her beautiful eyes looked up at us, pure and limpid as the diamonds that sparkled in her little crown.

"You little monkeys!" she cried. "Cholera is mowing down millions of people in the neighbouring cities, whole villages have been buried! Come down quickly from those trees, it is death that you eat in their fruit!"

She clasped us in her arms, her veils fell like mist around our heads, and her lips were soft and perfumed as she kissed us good morning.

The sunlight fell across a large carpet spread on the lawn. Kneeling on it, at the edge of a Persian cloth handpainted and ornamented with Arabic writing, we awaited the solemn approach of our father. Our shoulders were chastely hidden beneath shawls from Kashmir, our feet modestly covered by shoes. Jests in a low voice, stifled laughter, the reproachful eyes of our mother trying to overcome by exaggerated severity her desire to laugh at our frolic. Finally the grave appear-

ZERGUERAN

ance of our father. The servants, bowing low, their veils dropped over their faces, respectfully turned their backs upon him. We all rose, with timid gestures.

A short prayer, and my father took his large cup which awed by its important air our little cups suited to mere small girls. He drank slowly, in silence. A few seconds passed, insupportably long. At last they ended, my father departed. What joyous excitement ! The shawls were thrown aside, the shoes kicked off, the servants came to life again. Pushing our mother away from the samovar, each of us struggled to be first to pour herself a cup of tea, in spite of the energetic protests of our mother and the servants who expected to see us scalded by the boiling water. Plates were broken under our feet, eggs rolled from one side of the cloth to the other, the honey was spilled. My mother, really vexed at last, rose and threatened to call our father. The very word subdued us.

Suddenly the voice of my father was heard calling from the terrace to my mother. "Khanoum, where are your little savages ? Have them take their books and papers and go to Toutouse to prepare their lessons."

Heavens, what desolation !

Half an hour later we were obliged to go, all four. The piles of books on our heads impressed our servants by their number. The servants followed us with great respect ; however, they sincerely pitied us.

We began to climb Toutouse, the little mountain near the entrance to our large fruit gardens. The climb was difficult ; the stones, already heated by the sun, burned through our thin slippers. The servants came in a line behind us, bearing on their heads and shoulders a quantity of little rugs, cushions, mattresses

ARMENIA

and shawls, while old Nani, guardian of our seraglio, followed at a little distance, knitting. She felt even more than we the misery of our hard fate. When we paused to rest she overtook us, lamenting: "Your mother is a true Khanoum, knowing neither how to write nor how to read. What an idea, to make you languish, bent under books and weighed down upon your stomachs just after breakfast!" She detested our books, and we loved her because of that.

The carpets were unrolled beneath the walnut trees, and we sprawled upon the mattresses while the servants arranged cushions to support us more comfortably. A painted earthen pitcher filled with fresh water was placed beside each of us by my father's order; thus we had no excuse for leaving Toutouse before noon.

Arithmetic! How I detested it! Anahide was quick and sure with figures, so it was she who did my sums. Little Marian despaired because of her writing; my father found it ugly. As mine was beautiful, I covered the pages for her, and by making a few changes here and there she was saved from great efforts.

The hours yawned with boredom. For distraction, we changed our places every moment, pretending that the sunlight was moving upon us, and the servants left their sewing to rearrange our carpets, mattresses and cushions. Then we compared our lessons. We decided that the most difficult was geography, for my father had given us those books in French, of which we knew only the alphabet.

"Ile, ile, li-li-li," repeated Anahide. "It is land surrounded by water. Lac, lac, cla-cla-cla; it is water surrounded by land."

From time to time, struck by a discovery, we dropped

ZERGUERAN

the books to discuss it and to explain it to the servants, whose astonishment at our culture flattered us agreeably. Thus Anahide informed us that Russia is above the Caucasus. That meant that one only need climb the highest mountains, like Elbrous or Ararat, to be in Russia.

Our sister Heguine alone was plunged sincerely into the study of Persian history, from which she remembered only the stories of the djinns, the peris and the houris, without giving any attention to dynasties or kings. Her fancy painted so well the ancient myths and legends, added to the tales our servants told, that my father, admirer of poetry and a poet himself, easily forgave the complete absence of dates, dynasties and peoples in her accounts of history.

As for me, I was only anxious to know if the author of my book was right in saying that the seven lives of cats were only a superstition. As I always saw cats crouching mysteriously near the tripods of old serpent charmers, and as I felt an incomprehensible fear of them, I was persuaded that the author of my book was mistaken. Since people believed that cats had seven souls, they must have them.

It was finally decided to send one of the servants to bring a cat to throw from the top of the tallest tree. If the cat, dead for an instant, took again suddenly his second soul, then he would have others. If he died at once, then the author was right, and our belief a superstition.

The cat was soon brought, the servant climbed the tree and threw him. We watched him whirl through the air and strike the hard earth. There was an instant of silence. The cat lay motionless. Then suddenly

ARMENIA

he fled, with a frightful yowl. The people were right : a cat had seven souls.

One day, suddenly, my sister Heguine complained of a terrible toothache, she who had marvellous teeth. Nani examined her mouth. " No, no, little daughter, your teeth are like the snow on the mountains. There is not the smallest speck on them."

But the pain grew worse. Heguine screamed. She rolled on the earth, tearing at her hair and her lips. Servants ran for my mother. She came quickly, followed by the whole household. My sister could not be comforted ; her shrieks pierced our hearts. Some one was sent for the dandansaze. Every moment my mother dispatched another servant to command him to hasten.

Finally he arrived, the dandansaze. His air was haughty and mysterious, and his look full of pride at having been summoned by the great Khanoum, my mother. He brought with him an enormous bag of instruments, more mysteriously terrifying than their owner. Stopping at a little distance, he uttered a few cabalistic words, then, approaching my sister, he looked at her fixedly. No effect ; Heguine continued to scream. With solemn gestures he hung around her neck a talisman on a thread. She did not stop shrieking.

Embarrassed, with a thousand apologies and obeisances, the dandansaze asked my mother's permission to look into the mouth of the Khanoum Koutchoulou, the little lady. My mother, hesitating, but distracted by Heguine's suffering, consented ; the mouth opened.

The dandansaze stood astounded. There was no sign of a sick tooth.

ZERGUERAN

"Which tooth distresses the Khanoum Koutchoulou?" he asked.

"All of them!" cried my sister. "All of them hurt me!"

"No, no, Khanoum!" protested the dandansaze. "Only one of them is sick, but the suffering is reflected in them all. The sick tooth must be decayed at the root like an old tree. That is why one can see nothing wrong."

"Show which one it is, my beloved!" said my mother, embracing my sister and weeping with her.

"I do not know. All of them—all—these two front ones."

"Yes, it must be one of these two," announced the dandansaze. He touched them. "It is this one. It must be pulled."

The servants cried out in horror, we wept, my mother protested. Heguine, absorbed in her pain, did not listen, but continued to weep. The dandansaze, bowing low to my mother, insisted obstinately that the tooth should be pulled. At last the command was given. At the appearance of enormous pincers, large enough to pull the nails from a house-beam, Heguine fainted.

A desire to save her from the hands of the assassin filled me with fury. I screamed and fought; it was already too late. A marvellous tooth was torn from my sister's mouth. But the nerve was not yet cut; the poor tooth, like a pretty pearl, hesitated to fall. My sister, roused by the pain, awoke, and fighting the hand of the butcher kept him from finishing his work. Embracing her head, kissing her eyes, weeping, I tried to replace the tooth in its place.

ARMENIA

Suddenly, silence. My father had arrived. Trembling, in a few words my mother explained the scene. My father himself set the tooth back in its place, commanding my sister to remain all that day with her teeth clenched. Perhaps, the nerve not being cut, the tooth might yet be saved. The dandansaze went away in confusion, his great pincers having failed to pull one little tooth. My father said to my mother, "Khanoum, instead of allowing your child to be disfigured it would be better to prevent her from bathing at dawn in the waterfall and thus taking cold." Then he departed.

"The pain, little one, has it passed?" old Nani asked tenderly. Heguine nodded. "Khanoum," Nani said to my mother, "I told you not to break the jaw of this poor baby. It is because of some one's evil eye that this calamity came so suddenly without visible cause."

My mother was ready to believe it. She tenderly supported Heguine toward the house. It was agreed by all that my sister was the victim of a jealousy.

All that day the women of the village came to ask news of the little one, each bringing remedies and advice. Before evening Heguine's breast was covered by talismans and amulets which my mother permitted the peasants to lend her. Her feet wore countless mysterious cords. She was seated on warm bricks, and before her, on the red coals in a brazier, the excrement of sparrows and hairs from a red horse's tail were burned as a charm against evil spirits. The room was filled with our nearest neighbours who had come, according to our custom in times of affliction, to watch through the night.

ZERGUERAN

One of them brought a strangely shaped egg. She assured my mother that it was the egg of a cock, and that it would cure the sick who had the courage to swallow it in its shell.

When night had fallen an assembly of neighbours and servants squatted around Heguine's mattress. Crouched beside her, I kept one of her hands in mine, while my mother tenderly fondled the other, stooping now and then to push the hair back from Heguine's great sorrowful eyes and to kiss her pale cheek. Thus we listened to a thousand stories of the evil eye of the jealous and the envious, who by foul magic cause wicked spirits to enter the mouth in the form of diseases, there to pull the beautiful teeth and to cut the long hair of little girls whose beauty, by attracting evil thoughts, becomes the source of numerous woes. Therefore the women lamented Heguine's beauty, saying that beauty is ever a danger and a curse, the source of calamities, the bringer of evil. Or perhaps it was the happiness and prosperity of our parents that had brought upon little Heguine this terrible magic done by some bitter ill-wisher.

But in the morning Heguine was gay, and her tooth was in its place, quite unharmed.

It was believed in all that country that the wicked magic of some person envious of my parents had caused my sister Katarine to languish in a mysterious illness, a hidden evil which hollowed her cheeks, made her beautiful hands as yellow as wax, and stabbed her like a knife, now in the heart, now in the head. We cared for her tenderly. We spoke of her as of a fleeting visitor. To her the finest fruits, to her the best place,

ARMENIA

the deepest shade beneath the trees, the softest cushions. She was an idol, and every word that left her soft mouth, deepened at the corners by a timid smile, had for us the value of prophecy. All the singers, all the musicians, all the charms and spells, had been tried in vain; nothing could prevent this little candle from expiring.

She knew, our Katarine, that she would leave us soon, and as she knew that all little children go to Heaven, she waited tranquilly for death, happy to have been chosen by God to die before having sinned. She knew that when she was near to God, Who loves little children and listens to their words, she would be able to befriend us all by persuading Him to be lenient toward the sins of those who were dear to her, and she began a thousand promises with the words, "When God has taken me to Heaven——"

Our old aunt Djavahir had asked the honour of sewing her shrouds before her death, according to the immemorial custom of the Armenians, and these shrouds were kept in a niche in our house, like sacred relics.

Katarine knew these things (for in our country we never hide death from those whom it approaches), and in spite of her nine years that knowledge gave her an aspect of wisdom and separated her from us. She spent the days resting on cushions near our mother, who, while embroidering tapestries, talked tenderly with her dying child. At night she slept in the arms of each of us in turn, and once a week she lay between father and mother on the balcony, well protected from the dampness of the night.

ZERGUERAN

It was the sacred month of Mouhareem, in the springtime. Beyond our little olive garden the scrolled and painted mosque, usually so silently pointing toward Heaven its long minaret-finger, now opened wide its doors to throngs of the faithful. They came to mourn, in that sorrowful month, the deaths of their saints Hossein and Ali. In that same month long ago these two martyrs fell beneath the green banner of Islam, and since that time the Shiite Mussulman mourns for them during forty days and nights of every year, honouring their memory with chants and dancing and the thunder of drums. They believe that if devotion to these two martyrs remains faithful and strong the heroes will one day be resurrected ; Ali, the nephew, the adopted son and the son-in-law of the Prophet himself, and Hossein, the son of Ali, will rise in the flesh to restore the true dynasty of Mohammed upon earth.

Every evening during that long month of mourning I was carried into the mosque in the arms of my Tartar nurse, to whom my mother, faithful Christian though she was, did not dream of refusing permission to fulfil her religious duties. For my mother found it natural that each race should have its own God and Prophets, its own Heaven and Hell. I was too small to be questioned about my religion, and thus the doors of the mosque, so rigidly closed to all unbelievers, opened hospitably to the little intruder who watched eagerly all the mysteries of that sacred place.

In the fantastic light of pine torches hundreds of men, naked to the waist and with shaven heads, danced around an old well that held the bones of those who had beaten themselves to death in the dance. Led by a chief who struck his head and slashed the air with a

ARMENIA

hissing sword, they passed before my eyes in an endless leaping circle, beating themselves with iron chains that scattered drops of blood. Under the red light of the torches, surrounded by agonized shadows, covered with streaming blood and sweat, they danced and chanted like visions from hell, while the drums beat like the pulses of monstrous things, and all around them, close against the walls, the crouching women sobbed.

"Khanoum Koutchoulou," admitted my old nurse, leading me home through the cool darkness, "it is true that your religion is easier than ours."

Indeed, our religion did not seem to me a very hard thing. Our household was contented to thank God for each meal, and to call Him to our aid in time of sickness (not neglecting any charms that might also guard against the servants of the Prince of Darkness). My father agreed with his brother, the priest Ter-Barsegh, in saying that God is everywhere at all hours, and therefore we were permitted to pray to Him when we chose. Before sleeping and after rising, kneeling beside our mattresses on the floor, we earnestly repeated the Lord's Prayer. As it was in classical Armenian, of which we did not understand one word, we repeated it as a cabalistic formula, and, like our Nani, we believed that it was a charm to frighten evil spirits.

In addition to these prayers we observed faithfully the Friday fast-day, and the six weeks of Lent, that time when our poor Saviour suffered at the hands of Pharisees. During Lent we might not play the thar or tambourine, wear gay dresses, or sing or laugh. The women wore black, and sighed without ceasing; we children walked gravely. We felt everywhere, invisible among us, the presence of a Divine and beautiful

ZERGUERAN

Being Who was dying, the victim of His great love.

From our mother we learned that our great joy in living was sinful, and that it was a sin to hate the wicked or to resist evil, for the Saviour had said that when struck on one cheek we must offer the other to be struck also. Our little wild-animal minds were quite overwhelmed by the impossibility of understanding that we must not fight, complain, or, at the very least, howl, when our brothers slapped us.

After six weeks of fasting and sorrow, we passed through one day without a smile or a mouthful of food. This was the day when our Saviour was dying, and we suffered to repay Him for His long martyrdom and His terrible death for us. At the end of that day we were so happy to learn that He was truly dead now : it had been so painful to feel His long agony that it was a joy to know that it was ended. We slept tranquilly that night, having first looked at the beautiful garments we were to wear next day, and at the coloured eggs the servants had been preparing for us all that week.

In the morning all the world was happy, the bells of the churches were joyous. My mother, clasping us in her arms, smiling again with her beautiful eyes and soft lips, wished us joy, and told us that at last the Saviour was saved. What happiness to know that He had mounted into Heaven ! We were sure that in Heaven He would not always be surrounded, as He was on earth, by Pharisees. And what happiness to eat again kebab of mutton, cakes and fresh butter instead of horrid olive-oil ! And all with a light heart, because He was dead on the cross for our sins, atoning for them all. Now we were pardoned in advance for the sins of all the coming year.

ARMENIA

We were quite convinced that our religion was better than the Mussulman, and our old Nani, enlightened by us on that point, regretted very much that their mul-lahs had invented nothing to give them forgetfulness of their sins. She thought magnificent our way of wiping out ours by simply swallowing a little bread and some consecrated wine. And as even she, a Mussulman, told us that our religion was the most favourable for the life-long tranquillity of the soul, we were firmly persuaded of it.

Their Mouharem was harder than our Lent. During the whole time the Mussulman children wore deep mourning; from daybreak to sunset they neither ate nor drank. And then the terrible penitence of the dances in the mosque, where devotees, in order to share the fate of their saints, beat themselves even to death! How happy for us that our religion did not so torture our bodies, and that our gratitude to our Saviour need not go so far!

In the middle of the night, awakened by the red light that the torches threw upon the domes of our churches, I heard the wild sound of their drums and their terrible shrieks. With old Nani I climbed to the roof of our house where all the Mussulman servants crouched moaning, tearing their hair and their garments and covering their heads with ashes, while the procession of penitents passed below. In spite of myself, I burst into tears, and the servants, deeply touched that a Christian should shed tears for their Prophet, crawled to my feet, gratefully kissing my hands and the hem of my nightrobe.

In my bed, after repeating 'Our Father,' I added, "Dear, dear God, how happy I am that Thou hast

ZERGUERAN

created me Christian and not Mussulman ! I would never have been able to pull out my hair and to tear my flesh, nor to see my father and brothers killing themselves in honour of the Prophet."

But, humbled by the sincerity and self-sacrifice of those believers, I felt that they were more generous than we, because their Prophet received from them a profounder love than we gave our Saviour, tortured, crucified and dead to atone to God for our sins. A remorse gnawed ceaselessly at me during the forty days of Mouhareem. My sleep on those bloody nights was unquiet, full of visions of the dead, and from time to time I saw before me the beautiful and Divine Christ Who smiled upon me sadly. I felt that He loved me more than other Christians, because I alone knew that He came in vain, that He was crucified in vain, and that we, ungrateful after all He had sacrificed for us, had drawn from His words and His death only that which enabled us to forget our sins.

It was the heavy hour of noon. The sun, tired of climbing, stopped at the summit of the sky, and like a monster in anger poured down upon us his burning rays. The earth hardly breathed in the heat, the birds and all the little insects of the grass were silent. Far in the distance I heard a flute.

It was not a wedding : nuptial melodies awoke us at dawn, singing joy, hope, victory. This flute tore at the heart and penetrated the soul like the wailing of a child. It was the flute that followed Mingula, my cousin possessed by demons, who was being led to dance on the tombs of the saints.

Two aged figures, bent silhouettes, supported her.

ARMENIA

She was adorned as if for a fête. She reeled as she walked, like one drunken with wine. Her glossy hair and the sorrowful curve of her black eyebrows showed through the red veil. Her bracelets made a continuous sound, a sound like the rattling of teeth in an uncontrollable shiver. The passers-by avoided her as one avoids a leper.

She fell. The old women, terrified, bent above her, murmuring incantations. The musician knelt to play into the ears of the prostrate one and thus give her life again. The flute called to her tenderly, pleading, coaxing; then, suddenly no longer speaking to her, but to the demons who contended for her beautiful body, the music became vehement, accusing, terrible. A flutter of her hands replied. The old women lifted her to her feet.

Again propped by their bodies she continued her pilgrimage. The flute-player followed. The flute sang of courage, of endeavour, of brave struggle against the powers of darkness that held her. Her body began to move in faltering rhythms; she danced. Her clenched hands, now upraised, now striking upon her breast, expressed the anguish of life and death, the longing for rest, the terror of remaining in this world where one suffers so much, the dread of the unknown beyond death. How much agony there was in those gestures, now clutching at hope, now struggling for resignation! I could not look any longer; I ran blindly from the gateway into the gardens, stumbled, fell, and lay motionless on the grass, covering my ears with my arms to shut out the sound of the flute.

The next day my mother took me to see Mingula. More beautiful in her shrouds than she had been in her

ZERGUERAN

brilliant robes, she lay in the middle of a vast room. The gentle light of candles caressed her serene face. The violet hands of the mourners tightened from time to time the white band around her chin. Upon her death-bed she seemed remote and eternal as a mummy from the times of Pharaoh.

“My daughter, my child!” her mother chanted, shaking the folded dead hands as if to awaken her. “Must I grow old, only to see thee, thee so young, stretched out before me in thy shroud? Oh, Mingula! Mingula!”

“Mingula! Mingula!” the mourners repeated, like an echo, striking their knees with their violet-stained hands.

“Even yesterday, in thy nuptial garments, wert thou not like a bride awaiting her husband on the threshold of his chamber?” her mother cried. “What have I failed to give thee to-day, Mingula, that not even thine eyelids quiver at my call? Mingula! Mingula!”

And again the mourners repeated the name like an echo far away, while weeping filled the farthest corners of the room.

Unnoticed in a dark niche, my face wet with tears, I saw Mingula in the white sunlight of yesterday. I saw that body, now grave and motionless as an image of stone, clinging to life in rhythmic convulsions, as the sea clings to the shore. Again I covered my face, to shut out that dance of the frantic body trying to hold the soul.

But Mingula remained in the depths of my spirit, to inspire long years afterward, in moments of desolation and pain, the expressive gestures of a rhythmic sorrow.

ARMENIA

Upon the inflamed horizon the sun, draped in ragged blue clouds, fell like an old king in anguish. The brief Caucasian twilight followed his path above the mountains.

On the trails appeared the slowly moving grey and black files of the flocks, urged down to the folds by shepherds and their dogs. On the footpaths that led to the springs the red veils of the Armenian women moved to and fro. Their bracelets tinkled, the copper heels of their shoes made delicate clinking sounds upon the slabs of stone. One by one they went down to the pool, in twos and threes they returned, enriched with the fresh water that brimmed their balanced jars and with the village news gleaned from the gossip at the spring. The bells of the leaders of the flocks tinkled, the dogs barked. A labourer passed with his scythe. It might have been the new moon that he carried on his shoulder; his step was sure, accustomed to tread without faltering the edges of great chasms; his turbaned head was thrown back, his eyes keen as a huntsman's, his body supple. He advanced noiselessly and proudly like a panther. In passing he would throw us a "Good day," and we replied, "God's day."

An uproar, and we all scurried. My brothers were returning from hunting. Burned by the sun, exuberant, surrounded by hurrying servants, they came through the gardens, displaying the numbers of pheasants slung on their guns.

The sun disappeared suddenly, and twilight went with him. In a moment, night painted black the blue of the sky, and the first stars pierced the darkness. Dinner was ready on the balcony. In the middle of a large cloth spread on a carpet the candles stood pro-

ZERGUERAN

tected from the wind by glass shades. From copper plates many kinds of vegetables and several tiny mountains of variously coloured rice poured out their odours of spices and saffron. In a large earthen basin filled with snow a golden melon crushed heaps of grapes, plums and cucumbers. A sheepskin filled with wine lay beside a porous clay vase of cool water. The pheasants, in rows on the platters, all with their little claws crisped and their breasts stuffed with raisins and onions, awakened in us an instant of melancholy compassion, without diminishing in the least our eagerness to eat them. Before each of us, on a painted plate, our bread, thin and transparent as paper, lay ready to serve as fork and napkin. Not having dreamed of forks or napkins, we wrapped the bread about our fingers in order to eat daintily.

We stood while awaiting the entrance of my father and brothers. They entered in hierarchal order, and my brothers ranged themselves at my father's right on little mats laid around the cloth. In the same order we were placed at the left of our mother. The Christian servants came to stand behind us. The Mussulman servants were absent ; they took their meals apart because their religion forced them to regard us as impure.

A short prayer. Then the men took off their high fur bonnets, which they laid behind them on the carpet. The women kept their veils lowered, but we young children were freer ; our faces were uncovered, but the movements of our mouths were uncertain and difficult for fear of showing our teeth, which in modesty we must hide. The young spoke very little, the servants less than their masters. We children listened to our elders in silence, and replied with gestures. There was a

ARMENIA

continual movement around us ; a neighbour arrived, a few peasants came to talk of business affairs with my father. They were at once invited to share our dinner. From time to time the servants carried around the platters of food, walking across the cloth on naked feet that moved carefully among the dishes. Their veils fluttered like butterflies above the candles.

It was night, the mysterious night of shadow and stars. My father talked with the peasants, my mother sat on the balcony holding in her arms our beautiful fading Katarine. I was alone in the garden. I walked there like a princess, a mysterious sorrowful happiness overflowing my soul. I felt the souls of the roses, of the trees, of the grass, of all the living things of the world, loosed from their bondage and melting into the shadows of the night. The breeze touched my cheeks like invisible fingers. Outside the walls of the garden music called me.

Its many voices came from the camp of the sick, our summer visitors. For our little village of Zergueran was not only the most beautiful nook in all the Caucasus, it was also chosen to be blessed by Heaven. Miraculous waters sprang from the white breasts of our mountains into hundreds of basins cut in the rock ; these pools were able to cure all the sicknesses of the world. It was said that these waters had been given us by the magic of an old sibyl, who thus repaid our humble peasants for their kindness to the poor old witch. The gratitude of this good sibyl, long since dead, still nourished so well the inhabitants of Zergueran that they did no work, but lived happily, well fed by our multitudes of visitors. During the summer these sufferers came

ZERGUERAN

from all the peoples and tribes of leagues around, and our true believers only prayed to the good God to multiply for our prosperity the numbers of blind, lame and paralysed who might leave their afflictions in our pools.

To welcome them we had neither sanitoriums, hotels nor casinos, but since Allah had spread over us the arch of his great blue palace no one lamented the lack of these unknown comforts. Surrounded by their families, the sick were brought to us on mules or in wooden-wheeled carts drawn by oxen, and with them came their houses, lengths of silk or linen or bales of rugs. Stitched together with cords or withes of straw, these became the multitudes of tents that rose on all the pleasant spots among our cliffs and spread far out on the plain. The households brought with them flocks of sheep, goats, chickens and cows, that made a happy and exciting uproar enlivened by the ferocious barking of guardian dogs, as fierce as the hyenas of the cemeteries.

Amid such surroundings the sick were never bored. The days were a continuous fête. During the torrid hours of blazing sun the miraculous springs were filled with bathers. At the first breeze of evening these came from the waters and prepared for the night's festivities. At that hour we saw the Mussulmans prostrate on their rugs, the Christians telling their beads, the Jews with little black cubes tied to their brows, the pagans making their offerings at little fires. Tartars, Armenians, Circassians, all forgot their centuries of hate, and lived and prayed each to his own gods in amity together, during those summer months by our pools.

After the evening prayer all gave themselves carelessly to life and its joys. Music and song rose like an

ARMENIA

incense from the clustered tents : here a flute, monotonous and full of longing, wailed to the stars the yearning of the East for the Infinite ; there a savage drum gave sound to the rhythm of the Universe ; near-by a nasal voice mourned the losing all human joys in death, and far out on the plain a shepherd with a reed glorified the rising sun and the song of birds. Other shepherds in a group sang naïve happy verses, while the Arab and the Persian drew from their breasts in melancholy melody their unutterable longings for happiness. All these voices rising above the dark tree-tops floated up the immense heights of the mountains, where an echo hidden in the rocks softly repeated the songs to please the jackals and hyenas that watched from the precipices.

It was then that all Asia lay at our feet beneath the stars, Asia, with its profound melancholy, its languor, its mysticism, its vague desire for death and its ardent love of life. To my heart of a child these voices brought a sense of beauty and of pain, and the mystery of existence seemed to penetrate like a mist the red veils and the silken folds that wrapped my small body. I melted, I dissolved into the stars and the night, while my feet, accompanied by the clinking of the anklets I had put on at play, led me as though in enchantment toward a white figure that danced near the pools.

It was the beautiful daughter of a household near our own. Only a few weeks ago she had been married to a young sculptor of amber, and never had our village seen a festivity so glorious as her wedding. Her father, in honour of his only child, had spread for all comers a feast that surpassed all feasts in richness and plenty. Flocks of sheep had been slaughtered ; mountains of rice

ZERGUERAN

perfumed with saffron were heaped in multitudes of gold and silver dishes ; sweetmeats of all kinds, dates, figs, and piles of honeycomb were offered to all. In the midst of the garden, upon a raised platform, the young husband sat cross-legged like a sultan on his throne, two scarves crossed on his breast, and his feet resting on rugs surrounded by innumerable trays of food, platters of fruit and amphorae of wine. Our peasants, between eating and drinking, danced to the music of horns blown by our mountaineers, while on the white balcony of the house women in many-coloured veils surrounded the young wife who listened silently to the nuptial chants. All this was too beautiful, too splendid, not to arouse envy in the hearts of the wicked. By their curses and their enchantments the young wife had fallen into the power of the demons.

Hardly had she been married when she felt herself suffocating. Fever came into her garden and blew its hot breath upon her. Charms could not keep it away. Then she coughed ; there was blood on her lips, and she felt herself menaced by death. My father declared to her people that she was consumptive and needed only rest, good food and much sunshine, but our village always doubted those who knew the meaning of written words, since those who could read and write on talismans often brought evil. Therefore no one listened to my father, but a famous wise woman was brought to give her advice.

“ It is the work of evil spirits,” she said. “ Demons exhaust her in this manner. You have called me too late. Only one thing may perhaps save her. She must dance without stopping for three days and nights. Made uneasy by her ceaseless movements and by the

ARMENIA

shrill sound of the flutes the evil spirits may perhaps abandon her.”

So the sick girl was brought to the miraculous pools and bathed. Then, dressed in the bridal garments that had brought upon her the jealousy of the wicked, decked in her jewels, apart from the crowds, she danced, upheld by her mother and grandmother.

She danced, slim and ghostly before the dark rocks, beside the deserted pools. Sometimes her movements were slow; they expressed sorrow and her longing to stay by the side of her dear husband. Sometimes they were fast and furious; her whirling arms and struggling body protested against Death that would take her from all she loved—her gardens, the sunshine, and the songs of her birds. Then her gestures, slow and yielding like those of a tired child, offered to God her resignation to His mysterious wish. When, half-fainting, she lifted up her beautiful feverish eyes towards the dark and indifferent Heaven, I could not doubt that, softened by the efforts of this dying creature, Heaven would abandon its indifference and give her the little thing she asked—only a few years more in the radiance of the sun.

But Heaven did not relent. Even while I watched, on the third night of her dancing suddenly blood flowed black on her white veils, she shuddered, her tired arms fell, and she hung motionless in the arms of her mother. Only the shrill flutes, played by the squatting musicians in the shadows, went on for a moment before they, too, ceased.

She was dead, and dressed in a shroud she lay stretched out on rugs in her house, surrounded by the hired weepers kneeling in their blue garments of mourning. Murmuring the old litanies of sorrow, they rhythmically

Z E R G U E R A N

struck their withered knees with their violet hands, bending and swaying in the dance of grief. Then she was buried ; she was spoken of a little and heard of no more. Only I, for a long time, searched among the women possessed by demons in the hope of finding among them another girl as sweet and beautiful as she.

Always after that time, those who suffered from mysterious ills drew me toward them while they sought relief or forgetfulness in the dance. Most mysterious of them all, to me, were the chamanns, dervishes of the Mongols, who came to us from some far-away steppe. From time to time they would dance their strange dance of epilepsy through which they reached the peace that is nirvana. Their dance, more violent, more fanatic, and more exalted even than those of the possessed women, filled my heart with fascinated horror. Followed by our old Nani, I hastened always toward the sound of their savage drums and their shrill cries, and stood trembling like a bird before a snake.

Having whirled for a long time to the wild and savage cadences of the drums, they ceased to breathe. Only occasionally and very heavily their chests sobbed, while the dance became more frenzied, their hands struck their breasts, and their eyes became immensely enlarged. Then one by one they fell as though in a drunken lethargy. Piously they were covered with cloths and left lying hours upon hours, lost in that nirvana of absolute not-being for which they had longed as men in the desert long for water.

Nirvana. Nothingness. The eternal desire of mankind. Too young to know the bewilderment and soul-sickness of watching the ceaselessly changing appearances, the innumerable veils of illusion that surround us,

ARMENIA

I did not understand the thirst for oblivion that tormented these dancers. But I felt their agony of weariness that drove them to such efforts, and my mind struggled to comprehend the mysterious sorrows and joys that moved beyond their gloomy or delirious eyes.

My uncle, the priest Ter-Barsegh, patriarch of the village of Zergueran, loved to sit through the summer evenings on the balcony of his house with his people gathered around him. The village was going to sleep, the winds were still, and the noisy waters of the Arat, for ever at war with the rocks in its path below, spoke to us of the joys of peace. While the large stars came out above the mountains, and music rose from the tents at the foot of the cliffs, my uncle began those tales that often until midnight held us breathless. He was a well of those old legends that for centuries have been handed about among the people of the Caucasus, and none could tell them as he could.

At this hour the labourers had put the buffaloes into their dark stables, and the shepherds had fastened in the fold their goats and their lambs. The women, coming home from the fountain, had placed the brimming jar in its niche, had served the simple meal of cheese, fruits and wild honey, and had laid the children to sleep on rugs. Their day's work done, they prepared to visit my uncle, that they might hear his marvellous tales. Over their coarse blue blouses the men put on coats of thick black satin striped with gold, and they replaced their cotton turbans by heavy fur bonnets, that they might appear in dignified garb before their venerable priest, and in favourable aspect before the eyes of the women. Meanwhile the women added to their ordinary

ZERGUERAN

dress of rainbow-coloured skirt and wide-sleeved blouse their velvet jackets of many colours striped with gold, and clasped about their waists girdles of carved silver. Carefully swathed in many veils of red, they followed the men up the steep path that led to my uncle's balcony, and sat in decorous order upon the straw matting that covered its floor of earth. Beneath them, in the stable that, like the upper stories of the house, was half-carved in the steep slope and half-walled with rock, my uncle's buffaloes and his sheep were munching the last of their straw and settling themselves to sleep.

The house of our Uncle Ter-Barsegh was above ours, on the cliff that walled our fruit gardens and not far from our waterfall that fell from the rocks on its way to join the Arat. Since it was not outside our own gardens we could go there whenever we liked, even without old Nani, and often after supper we climbed the narrow trail to join the peasants on that pleasant balcony.

While waiting for the stories to begin the men lighted their pipes and smoked gravely, looking out upon the gorges and the cliffs that imprison the rebellious Arat. Against the sky stood Odzissar, the mysterious mountain that none dared approach. On its topmost peak, in an onyx throne surrounded by multitudes of venomous serpents, sat the Queen of all the reptiles in the world. In her mouth she held a diamond which, one night in every year, she spat into the air. At that moment, we were told, the darkness around the earth was lighted by its flashing. Only certain of the initiate and powerful, the sorcerers and kings, could behold that light.

A torch of resinous pine, fastened to the stone wall of my uncle's house, kept the shadows at bay. They lurked among the twisted trunks of the aged trees that

ARMENIA

enclosed the balcony. From the branches of the trees came a low sound, as though the night were breathing all around us. But in the strong light of the torch, which could resist the most furious wind, the mountain people in their brilliant colours resembled a flower garden. There was nothing to fear while we were near my uncle, who sat in our midst upon an embroidered cushion, his eyes benevolent and his long beard like a drift of snow upon his breast.

The evening began always with a solemn recitation of the Shasaka, the Rosary of Jewels. This was a litany invoking under names of magnificence and splendour God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Ghost, their archangels and their angels. To this my uncle added an invocation addressed to Satan, Prince of the Shadows and Master of the Abysses.

My uncle ended his incantation. He smoked his pipe for a long time in a profound silence. We were aware of the night, and of the deepening coolness of the mountain air. Djavahir, the bowed old wife of Uncle Ter-Barsegh, the one-eyed, bitter woman, stealthily brought from the house a glowing brazier. Its light upon her withered face was like that of a sorcerer's furnace. I could never realize that this hideous person had been the most beautiful of the village women fifty years before; but it must have been so, for legend said that the sun itself had hidden its face behind the clouds in jealousy whenever she came out on Sundays in her garments embroidered with silver and gold.

Then my uncle began his tale. What treasures he had stored in that venerable head, behind those eyes that had watched a hundred and one years pass over our mountains! Things seen and heard, old myths, legends

ZERGUERAN

and traditions, all gathered into a Christian faith that embraced all religions, a faith in which all roads, even the most shadowy, led to Paradise. His voice revived for us the chimeras of old times, peopled the night with four-headed dragons, with flying horses from whose nostrils came smoke, with witches' revels and the cruel love-making of demons.

"Our village," began my uncle, "was formerly only a few huts perched here upon the precipice. There lived in it hunters and men who were skilful in robbing the wild bees of their honey, which abounded in all the forests. In one of the huts lived a young hunter. He was tall and strong, but he lived alone ; he had no wife.

"One day he went into the forests to kill deer. He went far, and it was late when he saw a buck with great horns, that saw him and fled. He followed it, hot with the chase, and did not heed where he went. But night was upon him, the buck vanished among the trunks of trees, and the young hunter saw that he was in the strange forest of Odzissar. He stood and gazed, and he saw beside the trail a beautiful young girl who wept. Her long hair covered her arms and knees, and he could not see her face.

" 'What can I do to comfort thee, beautiful one ? ' he asked. She did not reply, but continued to weep. 'Tell me thy sorrow,' said the hunter with tenderness, and came close to her. She was silent. He drew aside her hair and stood without breath, marvelling at a beauty of which he had never seen the equal. Two eyes, clear and deep, sent a glance to the roots of his soul and kindled there one of the loves that do not cease burning till death extinguishes them. 'Tell me,' he murmured, 'why dost thou weep ? '

ARMENIA

“ ‘I was asleep,’ said the girl, ‘until thy coming wakened me. I saw thee, and my soul left me and clung to thy feet, never to be separated from thee. I am not thy wife, therefore I weep.’

“ There were no words in the mouth of the young hunter. He lifted the girl and held her to his heart. Then drunken with joy he returned to the village. The mountaineers celebrated their wedding with music of pipes and flutes, and left them happy in his cabin.

“ Then day and night were sweet as honey to the young hunter. Singing strange songs, his wife walked about his house ; she spread the cushions upon the floor and made beautiful for him the platters of fruit and of rice. He hunted through all the mountains and sold to wandering foreigners the skins of deer and the horns of stags, in order to buy for her bangles of gold and bracelets and collars set with amber and coral, which sang together when she danced for him.

“ One morning, hardly yet awakened, the young hunter was perfuming with sandalwood the heavy tresses her beloved head, when a knock was heard at the door. The young wife ran laughing to open it. An old fakir stood on the threshold. The skin of a lion hung from his naked shoulders, another was about his loins. He leaned on a staff, and on his hand was a great ring of onyx. He asked for shelter.

“ ‘Enter, old man, in the name of God and all the Prophets,’ said the hunter, and he commanded his wife to bring the best of their food for the venerable guest. She set before them goats’ milk, wild honey and grapes, and she went into the garden to gather fresh figs. The old man sat, and he and the young hunter ate together.

ZERGUERAN

“ ‘ You have great courage, O my son,’ said the old fakir. ‘ I wear the skin of a lion, but you have his heart in your breast. Only one with more than human courage could marry a serpent and live with her in peace.’ ”

“ ‘ What dost thou say ? ’ cried the young husband. He rose, enraged, to drive the old man from the hut. ‘ Thou art no true fakir, but an evil man with lies upon thy tongue ! ’ ”

“ ‘ Wait, my son,’ said the fakir, and smiled. He held out his hand, on which the onyx ring was like a pool of milky water. ‘ Behold this onyx. It will become black in the presence of a serpent who wears the form of a woman.’ ”

“ At this moment the young wife came in from the garden, bearing a dish of copper filled with purple figs, and looking meekly on the earth. The young hunter saw the ring become black.

“ ‘ O cursed old man ! ’ he cried, when the young woman was gone. ‘ Give me proof that thou art not a messenger from the depths below, or thou wilt not go out from here alive.’ ”

“ ‘ I will do so,’ said the fakir, who had not ceased to smile. And he told the young man to put into the food of his wife a great quantity of salt, to empty the water-jar, and to fasten the door and window that night. ‘ Lie down and pretend to sleep, and thou shalt see what thou shalt see.’ ”

“ As he had said, so the young man did. At midnight the young wife awoke. She rose and went to the water-jar and found it dry. She went to the door, and it was locked. She sighed. She pulled at the bars of the window, but they did not yield. She moaned, and

ARMENIA

walked to and fro. Then she stopped above her husband and looked at him attentively.

“As he appeared to be quietly sleeping she became calm. She went to the chimney, rested her beautiful bare arms against the wall, and again looked at him. Then she put her head into the fire-place, and the blood of the young hunter became snow-water as he beheld the most hideous of abominations. He saw the slender, graceful neck of his wife change into the body of a serpent, stretch out longer and longer. Entering the chimney and passing over the roof, it balanced in the air outside the window its foul head of a viper, opened eagerly its mouth in which whistled a double-pronged tongue, and stretched to the borders of the Arat. Seeing the water before her, she bent downward her horrible head and for a long time remained, pressing her serpent’s mouth to the river. The stream dwindled and grew weak, its noise was stilled. The Arat was dry when her thirst was quenched, and she lifted the long undulating neck. It rose in the air, and became shorter. The head again passed the window, it came down the chimney, and appeared once more as the beautiful head of a woman on the woman’s body that waited for it. The young wife wiped her crimson lips, wet from the river, and trembling came toward her husband. Seeing him still as though asleep, she smiled, and stretching herself beside him laid her arms about his neck and slept. But the husband, neither sleeping nor waking, remained rigid in the embrace of horror.

“At dawn he went to the fakir and begged to be told how to get rid of this monster that was his wife. ‘There is only one way,’ said the fakir. ‘She must be burnt

ZERGUERAN

alive.' And he told the young man how this should be accomplished.

"Accordingly, that day when the young wife leaned above the furnace where she was preparing to bake bread, her husband suddenly pushed her into the living coals and rolled a great rock upon the opening.

" 'Why dost thou burn me, O my beloved?' cried his wife's voice. 'What harm have I ever done thee? Were we not happy? Woman or serpent, did I not love thee more than the light of my eyes? Was I not sweet to thy lips and a joy to thy heart? O my beloved! O my beloved! We were so happy!' The voice became a groan and a sigh, and the young hunter heard no more.

"Then sorrow took hold of him, and he remembered the beauty and the clear laughter of his wife. He remembered the care she had for his comfort, he remembered her smiles and the soft arms in which he had slept, and the mouth, red and fresh as a flower, that wakened him with kisses in the dawn. He tore his garments and flung himself on the ground.

" 'O fakir, cursed among men! Why didst thou bring me knowledge that killed my happiness? Why didst thou make me see, when I was blinded with joy? Curses on the light that shows me grief! Curses on the truth that is bitter, when lies were sweet! O sorrowful God Who knowest all things, why couldst Thou not leave me happy in my little ignorance?'

"He tore the stone from the furnace. There was naught but ashes and one small coal that still burned like a closing eye. He placed it upon his two eyeballs and put out the light that showed him the world. Then, blinded, he gathered up his garments and set out to

ARMENIA

look for death. No man has seen him since that day.

“As for the fakir, he gathered carefully the ashes of the burned body, and as by rubbing them he was able to change into gold the meanest of metals, he soon became the richest and most respected man in all the Orient. But it is said he was never happy, because to the day of his death he was tormented by a thirst that was never quenched, and in his ears when he died was the hissing of many serpents.”

On my uncle's balcony a sound like that of a forest in a light wind came from the crowd. My uncle emptied his pipe and thrust it back among the folds of his girdle, then he turned his eyes toward the mountain Odzissar that rose shadowy against the dark sky like the bonnet of a fakir. Always when he had finished his tale he told us what the weather would be next day. To-night he said, “Morning will bring us a tempest from the inferno. I hear the whistling of the serpents' tongues.”

The summer ended, the rose-petals fell, and in their place appeared the red rose-berries. We should have gone to our winter home in Shamahka, but the death of our Katarine, which we awaited, held us in the country. A strange serenity filled our lives, our voices were low, our movements gentle. One would have said that the moon was broken, to fill us with its light.

The last moment came. Kneeling around the low couch we awaited in reverent silence, as for the touch of a sacrament, the instant when her pure soul, fluttering like the flame of an expiring candle, should mysteriously depart. Already she had been given the bath of the dead ; she lay wrapped in her shrouds, and from

Z E R G U E R A N

time to time we lifted and piously kissed their hems. By what heedlessness of destiny had she come into the world, our little martyr with the sad smile which remained unchanged even when death had gently closed her uncomplaining lips ?

All through the night we watched beside her, recalling her last words and all her last gestures, which seemed to us filled with mystic meanings.

At dawn all the village was in our garden and in the court, where the men were solemnly seated upon carpets. Through the open doors of the house poured the lamentations of the hired mourners who knelt around the couch of the dead. Impassive and white, in the midst of their hypocritical blue mourning garments, she seemed carved of marble.

Soon, all together, we accompanied her to the church. Two of our brothers carried the litter on which she lay, covered with a white cloth. Behind it walked my uncle, the priest Ter-Barsegh. In order to shorten the tedium of the long Mass he had begun it, as was his custom, while putting on his funeral robes ; he continued it while on the way, and finished it on entering the church.

It was ended. We should never see her any more. And the thought that this very night the jackals and the blood-suckers of Terjan-Bagh would come to disturb the light earth above her and to appease their bloody thirst upon this poor little body, stopped the flow of life in my veins. My mother in her violet mourning veils fell upon the body, fiercely holding it to her breast. Unconscious, she was drawn away.

And when she returned to her sorrow, outside, in the sunshine, all around us life had already resumed

ARMENIA

its alluring carelessness. The preparations for the funeral fête, more lavish than those for a wedding, engrossed a hundred old women. The young were laughing and chattering of everyday affairs, the half-naked children leaped and tumbled around the braziers, attracted by the curious odours of the funeral meats perfumed with herbs gathered from the cemetery.

Only our anguished hearts cried out for Katarine, the little motionless prayer that had gone from us to God.

Christmas found us still at Zergueran, on that holiest of all the days on which the Christians of the village assembled to listen to the words of my uncle.

My uncle, the priest Ter-Barsegh, was not one of the great dignitaries of the Church who wear the tiara sparkling with sapphires and the scarf embroidered with pearls, but he was nevertheless greatly revered by all the villagers of Zergueran. Tall, majestic, his long hair whitened by the winters of more than a hundred years, he might have been taken for the patriarch Noah himself when in the evening he stood on the terrace watching the sunset walk with golden feet on the heights above the gorges. His eyes were calm and his hands were folded beneath the long white beard that swayed against his robe with the gentle motion of a willow bough.

He knew neither Latin nor Greek, but he was a wise man and a scholar. He had only one book, the Bible, which for thirty years had lain unopened, gnawed by the rats in his little half-ruined chapel; but he knew by heart all the Book of Job, the Songs of Songs, and the Apocalypse. To these he added visions of his

ZERGUERAN

own, worthy of the most saintly hermits of Biblical times. Although, with the passage of years, he had forgotten even the alphabet, this slight lack did not in any way lessen either his wisdom or his great knowledge.

He was not only a scholar but a saint, whom God had greatly blessed. Father of eighteen sons, each of whom had begotten at least as many, his horn was indeed a horn of plenty.

No corner of the universe more needed the refreshment of the holy teaching than our beautiful Zergueran, trampled over now by the children of Islam, now by the followers of the great Buddha. Among so many faiths the Christians of Zergueran would surely have been lost without their shepherd, the priest Ter-Barsegh, who taught them the 'Truth of Truths, and at each village festival they listened gladly to the splendour of his words, which showed them the gates of the eternal Eden and the abysses of hell.

The most solemn of these festivals was that of Christmas. At that time the good Christian was blessed and pardoned for all the past year; at that time he was allowed to kiss reverently the right hand of my uncle, which was called "The Holy Hand."

While the edges of the lofty rocks were still golden and the first star shone in the pale sky of that evening, we saw the faithful slowly climbing the path that led to my uncle's stable. Against the steep slope the low stone walls looked like part of the mountain itself; the arched doorway, dimly lighted from within by torches, seemed the mouth of a cave, and into it, one by one, passed tall men in bonnets of fur, women covered with red veils and holding their nurslings to their breasts, little girls whose eyes shone through

ARMENIA

veils of green and blue. They entered the low, dim place, where the breath of the cows and the odour of dung and straw mingled so well with the smoke of torches and the perfume of sandalwood that one could believe himself among the groves of the cherubim.

On that evening my uncle combed his hair and his beard and put on his new vestment. Then for a time he walked alone on his balcony, while in the stable beneath his feet the Christians of the village assembled. When all was ready he descended, and appeared before the eyes that looked upon him reverently.

He knew everything, my uncle ; he knew the beginning of the world and its end, how and where Paradise had been built, and what were the colours of hell, full of demons with tails three yards long and tongues that hung to the earth. He knew what made the earthquakes that so often shattered our cliffs. He could point out—and never make a mistake—the witches and magic-workers who brought down upon us the pests that devoured the flocks and the cholera that desolated homes. Although he himself was not a sorcerer, he knew how to cast and to take off spells. And with what generosity he distributed talismans ! How many holy formulæ he knew, to bring us rain during the dry months or to guard against tempests on vintage days ! So highly was he regarded in Heaven that when, even by chance, he pronounced the name of Saint Karapet or Saint Kirakos, a soul that had been lost among the wandering dead passed rejoicing from the cursed fields to the joys of Paradise.

“ On this day of Christmas, day of the birth of the son of God, God’s son created our father Adam,” began my uncle. “ By the grace of God—may the

ZERGUERAN

songs of cherubim delight both His ears for ever!—we have come again to this anniversary of the birth of His Son. In order that He might be born, die and come to life again each year, like the flowers and fruit-trees, God made Him of a different substance than ours. Such was the will of the Almighty.”

My uncle made the sign of the cross, which was repeated by all the assembly.

“In the beginning,” continued my uncle, “there were only immense gardens of golden trees under which, lying at ease on the grass, the Almighty listened to the songs of cherubim. But because there was no envious eye to behold—and by beholding, to increase—His happiness, the idea came to Him to create Satan, to give him wings and power and to reveal to him the mystery of birth and death.”

Consternation passed through the listeners like a wind through grass. The name of Satan had been pronounced! Without doubt the Evil One had entered, invisible, and remained there watchful lest he be too much calumniated.

But there was nothing to fear. Each time he spoke the dreadful name my uncle bowed respectfully. Satan, being the creation of God, might one day be pardoned and restored to his place near the Throne; it was therefore wise to fear and propitiate him.

My uncle spoke in quite a different manner of the little demons, the djinns. They were creations of Satan, and moreover these turbulent active little beings were only apprentices to the Prince of the Abysses. My uncle treated them as befitted their rank, and sometimes even went so far as to abuse them.

“But Satan, not content weakly to envy and to

ARMENIA

admire God, set out to create for himself a kingdom of his own. Beholding the multitudes of djinns which Satan loosed upon the earth, God repented His deed, and summoned to Him the Angel Gabriel.

“ ‘Gabriel,’ said He, ‘what can be done against the mischief-making of My latest creation?’ ”

“ ‘My Father,’ replied the Angel Gabriel, ‘the mistake has been made. Complaining will not wipe out an error. It must be righted. It is clear that Thou hast not time, Thyself, to attend to the welfare of both Thy Heaven and Thy earth. Therefore create for the pleasure of Thine eyes a Son Who will govern the earth, leaving to Thee only the care of Heaven. And tell Thy Son to create men to serve Him. Let there be as many of these as Satan has big and little djinns, and let Thy Son and His creatures contend with Satan and his djinns.’ ”

“ ‘Gabriel,’ replied God, ‘in this matter thou art wiser than I. It shall be as thou hast said.’ ”

“ Thereupon He created out of the clouds the Virgin Mary and set her upon earth. Then He descended unto her in the shape of a dove and she conceived a son whom she brought forth in the twinkling of an eye.

“ At once the Son of God created from the dust Adam, our ancestor. Adam arose, and taking from his side a rib he held it out toward God the Son, saying, ‘I want a woman. Create for me a woman.’ And God the Son took the rib, stirred up with it the dust beneath the feet of Adam, spat upon it, and behold ! there was Eve, our sinning mother, who caused all misfortune to fall upon our heads.

“ There was no virtue in her. By reason of gluttony,

ZERGUERAN

curiosity and disobedience, she, our mother Eve, received Satan the enemy in her garden, listened to his words, and ate of the apple which he gave her. Then in His anger God the Father cursed her and her children with bitter curses, so that the anger of God has never departed from us.

“Cursed be the woman !” cried my uncle. “Cause of our perdition, bringer of woe, calamity of calamities, curses upon her !” His voice became as terrible as that of the prophet Job. “Root of all our sins ! Abyss of evil ! Tomb of virtue ! Cursed she is and shall be !” His thundering words fell on the bowed heads of the trembling women and bent them to the earth.

Slowly his holy anger passed, and he continued his story.

“Then God the Son, having seen His Father’s plan spoiled by the sin of Eve the wicked, and beholding the enemy, Satan, lay hold of the human race which in the space of a single day had covered the earth, became stricken with woe and tore His garments and covered His head with ashes. Then alone He went toward these followers of Satan, who took Him and crucified Him.

“Seeing Him on the cross His Father was afflicted and cried out, saying, ‘Why dost Thou cause Thyself to be crucified, My well-beloved Son ?’

“And God the Son answered him, saying, ‘This I do for the human race which I have created. Forgive them as Thou lovest Me.’

“‘The human race, which entered into alliance with Satan ?’ replied God the Father, marvelling greatly.

“‘They are the work of My hands. Forgive them

ARMENIA

for love of Me,' said God the Son, and God the Father said, 'So let it be.'

"Thereupon, although disgusted with the human race, God pardoned us. And that is why, in spite of all our actions, which stink with the odour of demons, we shall be pardoned by God and placed high in His Paradise."

Here my uncle grew even taller, and stretching out his right hand above the bowed heads he said solemnly, "On this day of the birth of our Creator, Saviour and Master, on this day of the birth of humanity, I bless you and pardon you in accordance with the will of God."

All crossed themselves, hurried forward to kiss the Holy Hand of my uncle, and went their way cleansed of sin.

As for me, I remained rooted to my place, dazzled. For me no Bible story surpassed in marvels this one of my uncle, whose wisdom was greater even than that of the Saints Matevos and Tatevos.

Armenia : *Shamahka*

WE had returned to our winter residence at Shamahka, formerly an Armenian city, later a principality of Tartarian Khans, independent and sumptuous until its capture by the Cossacks of Russia.

Black caverns like the eyes of monsters deep-set in the rocks silently told the terrible stories of the prisons of the Middle Ages. Here and there were traces of old castles that had disappeared; turrets with their teeth decayed, walls worn away. All this was smothered in gardens, buried in masses of roses and vine; only the song of the poplars remembered the passing of old happy days. Only their murmuring, and the ceaseless, liquid voice of the clear streams in empty streets between high white walls, recalled the glories of King Dandouk and the Queen of Shamahka, and the beauty of houris incarnated in the sweet bodies of dancers, who had descended from Paradise itself for love of the Khans.

Now, like an old beggar sitting beside the highway, Shamahka dreamed of the long-gone days when, young, beautiful and adored, decked, in all the jewelled glory of old Armenia, she had been the laughing queen of the world's romance. Long caravans of camels had come from the homes of all the winds, bringing the spices of Arabia, the golden ornaments and singing lutes of Babylon, the carved ivories and jades and painted tea-chests of China, the emeralds and elephants' tusks of India, to lay them

ARMENIA

at the feet of the Queen of Shamahka, whose beauty surpassed them all.

She was so beautiful, that ancient queen, that legend itself was dumb, unable to find words worthy of her hair, her eyes, her little feet. When she walked on her terraces the sun became pale before her, as the stars before the moon. The perfume of her graciousness was sweeter than that of all the flowers in the world's gardens. Her very name awakened in the hearts of men a love that devoured them in its flame as moths are devoured in the lesser fire of torches. Her courtiers could not look even upon her floating veils, lest they be blinded. And this great beauty troubled the wise men of her kingdom, for in all her lands and in all the neighbouring kingdoms there was no man worthy to become her husband.

And the queen wept, for her heart was the heart of a woman, though her beauty was that of the angels of Paradise, and there was no one in all the known world to whom she could give the treasures of her love. The hate of a woman scorned is more terrible than the hate of all the demons, but the anguish of a woman who cannot love is greater than the anguish of all their victims.

While the queen wept, alone in her gardens—and all her tears became pearls—in unknown lands beyond the sea King Dandouk, on a throne of ivory and gold, leaned his chin on his hand and was sad. Before him the most beautiful dancing girls unveiled themselves in voluptuous dances, their gestures scattering like drops of dew the sweetest music of thars and tambourines. His little negro slaves tumbled on the marble pavements ; serpent charmers made toys of deadly snakes ;

SHAMAHKA

magicians wove powerful spells. All in vain ; the heart of King Dandouk was ice in his breast ; he sighed for something and could not say what it was. But while he walked alone in his garden at twilight, he heard outside his walls a wandering singer singing of the Queen of Shamahka ; he heard her name. His heart of ice was melted by the sound of those syllables. King Dandouk loved.

Before the sun shone again on his court, heralds had summoned all his warriors, his huge war-elephants, his musicians and magicians and readers of the stars. In the morning he set out to make war on Shamahka. He came with ten thousand elephants armoured in silver and gold, ten thousand horsemen armed with spears, and ten thousand camels bearing food and water for his armies. He came across the deserts toward Shamahka, and before him rode seven powerful magicians, who scattered on every wind a perfumed drug that went before them like mist.

Everything that breathed that perfume slept. The roses closed their petals, the birds hid their heads beneath their wings, the fountains dwindled and were still. In the bazaars of Shamahka the camels knelt, the buffaloes lay down in their harness, buyer and sellers ceased their bargaining and lay asleep among their goods. In the palace of Shamahka the queen slept on her throne, while all her courtiers, unable to resist the spell, lay dreaming in their robes, like bales of brocades at her feet.

So King Dandouk rode into the city of Shamahka, by the soldiers that slept at the open gates, and through the silent bazaars, and up through the palace gardens to the steps of the great audience hall. He entered, and

ARMENIA

looked at the sleeping queen. Through her veils he saw the crescent moons of her eyebrows, and for a long time he remained motionless, under the spell of his great love. But at last he came up the steps of the throne, and kneeling at the feet of the queen he touched with his lips the hem of her robe.

The queen awoke, she lifted her lids and looked at him. In that moment their two souls were united, never again to part until the sun grew cold.

It was thus that King Dandouk married the Queen of Shamahka, and they lived together in her city, since not all the kingdoms of the world could tempt her from it, and for her sake King Dandouk renounced his throne beyond the seas. And Shamahka rejoiced in the light of those twin suns, while in their palace the two eternal lovers lived in Paradise, which they had reached without passing through the gates of death. For them the houris descended, and the peris danced in robes of more than earthly beauty.

Glorious in all Asia Minor, these little dancers wandered from city to city, kindling all hearts with the fiery music of their silver ornaments. Little goddesses with languid eyes in which smouldered the fires of all human passions, little bodies trembling, colourful, tender and fierce! They filled the dreams of my childhood. In the drowsy silence of our gardens' noons, when all but I slept in the shadows, I imitated the undulations of their ethereal bodies, the waving of their delicate veils. How far I was from imagining that one day I, too, would go wandering in the world as one of those dancers of Shamahka!

Our large white house, built on a little hill, looked

SHAMAHKA

over treetops and surrounding walls to Ker-Galassi, Mountain of the Virgin. Upon the rock that crowned it, cruel and sharp against the sky, once died captive a beautiful Armenian virgin, whose sacrilegious love for a Mussulman had been discovered by her parents. The flame which she had not conquered in her heart had for ever destroyed her honour. Yet, rather than deliver her to be stoned to death, her parents had chosen to punish her themselves, thus washing from their name the shame she had brought upon it. They had isolated her upon the mountain to die of hunger and cold.

From the windows of our house, through long hours of dreaming, I gazed at that rock. I brooded upon the memory of that infatuated virgin, her despairing love, her unrealized desires, her suffering through freezing nights when the winds tore her hair and veils and the fierce cold stars chilled her warm blood meant to glow beneath a lover's caresses. Her life and death were my one human love-story.

I resolved that I, too, would love a Mussulman. Yes, to avenge her I would love even a bandit of the mountains. But I would not love a coward. My man would be brave; he would do a thousand deeds of prowess to bring me bracelets and heaps of golden ornaments. His name would be glorious; maidens would dream of it; the bravest would pale at his approach. And when our love was discovered, he would never leave me alone upon a mountain to die; he would tear down the very mountain to save me!

One night a terrible hurricane shook the walls of our house. Awakened by the cries of the servants and the flashing of torches, I heard the cruel screams of the

ARMENIA

wind, the shrieking of tormented trees, the crash of their falling. I felt the floor trembling beneath me, and my first thought was for the virgin of Ker-Galassi. 'O unhappy heart, what did you do alone upon the mountain in such a night as this? Bitterness was more cruel than the night. Your unworthy lover was not beside you. In the cold, in the wind, alone, you wept while your mother and sisters slept on cushions of birds' feathers. Why was I not near you? I would have been your sister. More loving than your own people, I would have clung to you, comforted you, dried your tears with my hair, and if anyone had tried to separate us we would have thrown ourselves, together, from the same precipice!'

The voice of my mother brought me back to realities. She called me to a brazier around which the household was huddled. My father read aloud to us from the Bible the beautiful story of Christ.

My mind halted upon Mary Magdalen. I forgot the virgin of Ker-Galassi; my desire for love found another marvel upon which to nourish itself. Ah, to be Mary of Magdala, a beautiful sinner! To love a Mussulman, a Tartarian Khan, a Sheik-ul-Islam, an Ibue of Arabia! To have underground halls scented with Eastern perfumes, gardens filled with birds of Paradise, peacocks, canopies embroidered in far-away lands by women with slender yellow hands and slanted eyes. To be the Magdalen, cursed, calumniated, injured by those who hate the beautiful, to be stoned one day publicly, and then to see the Christ Himself defend me, the Divine Christ Who alone would pardon the beautiful their delight in beauty, I, too, would have given up everything for that one Being Who

SHAMAHKA

would have understood, Who would have loved me, the sinner.

“Father, why did not Christ marry her?”

My father stopped, thunderstruck.

“You talk nonsense, my little daughter,” he replied gravely, and continued his reading.

The word angered me. Nonsense? Had he not read to us that Mary had abandoned for Him her gardens and her house in Magdala, that with her beautiful hair she had dried His feet after pouring upon them perfumes? She was, then, in love. How could Christ, Who loved her already, have been able to resist the desire to press her close to His breast, if one sleepless night she had come into His tent to lay her head tenderly upon His shoulder and to envelop him with her perfumed hair? She had not the courage to dare, that was it. As for me, nothing would have stopped me.

My father closed the book, saying that Biblical times have passed, and that humanity has lost its grandeur. “No one now will crucify himself for an ideal; each thinks of nothing but his own well-being.” And he told us of the ardent faith of the first Christians in the times of Tiberius and of Nero, of the fêtes in the arenas at Rome, of the beautiful Christian women thrown naked into the jaws of panthers, of the massacres in the catacombs. “We are to-day incapable of so much heroism.”

“That is not so, my father. I myself aspire to die for some one. In what country are Christians persecuted now?”

“In none, my daughter, because there are no Christians. Christ is forgotten in our days.”

ARMENIA

“Even at Rome?”

“Even at Rome.”

“O father, and I shall never have the happiness of dying in holy ecstasy before millions of Romans?”

“Christians are persecuted to-day only in Turkey,” my mother sighed. “Your grandfather, your grandmother, and your uncles were all massacred there on the same day. Your aunts violated and were sold as slaves.”

“That was done only to pillage us. Christ counted for nothing in those massacres,” replied my father in a sudden flare of anger. “If Armenia were not the richest province in Turkey, these brigands would not have thought of allowing us to enrich ourselves in order to murder us and seize our wealth.”

But I listened no longer, returning to my own thoughts. Ah, no! To be violated and sold, without being in a circus arena beneath the eyes of young warriors longing only to save me—to die as a slave in some unnoticed corner of a garden? No, no, neither for Christ nor for God Himself!

The days, the evenings and the nights passed monotonously. In the mornings, stretched upon a carpet in the garden, motionless, my eyes closed, my ears lulled by the chant of the frogs in the lakes of Hadji-Sayalagh, I wandered through imagined gardens of love. From time to time I opened my eyes to see that no tarantula had crawled upon me, that no reptile was balancing itself upon a branch above my head.

The muezzin chanted the noon-hour. I arose.

The afternoons were long. I wandered through the

SHAMAHKA

house, purposelessly. One day I found my brother Alikh reposing upon cushions ; the sunshine touched his white forehead and his heavy black locks. His eyes were large and filled with dreams. I stopped. How handsome he was ! He called me, and gently made me recline beside him. Hesitating, I stretched myself out timidly.

"How beautiful you are in your white veils," he said. "I would marry you, if I were not your brother."

I blushed. "I regret also that you are my brother. I do indeed desire to have a husband as beautiful as you are, Alikh."

"Perhaps he will be even more beautiful," he said jealously. "And you will learn to love an unknown blockhead more than your brother."

I tried vainly to protest.

"What will you say to him when he first lifts the veils from your face ? How will you embrace him ? " he asked, putting his arms about me.

My heart beat tumultuously. "I do not know, Alikh. I shall say nothing. I shall take his head like this, I shall press it against my heart, and I shall weep with happiness." There were tears in my eyes, and I tenderly kissed my brother to hide my emotion.

"You know that if we had stayed in the religion of our ancestors, in the religion of Zoroaster, I would have been able to marry you," he said.

"And only because long ago our fathers left that religion, Alikh, now I shall be given to no matter whom, to some one old and ugly, but never to you."

"My sweet sister, we may love each other as fiancées. There is no sin in that. Come, lay your head upon my

ARMENIA

shoulder, close your eyes, let us not talk any more."

So for hours at a time we rested in each other's arms, filled with a vague, sweet emotion. The whole family knew that we adored each other, that I went every night to kiss him in his bed, and that he never slept without receiving that kiss.

As for me, I fell asleep only with the coming of the last stars ; I lay awake thinking that the day was near when some young unknown girl would lie beside him, and a profound sadness flooded my heart. To comfort me, he promised that he would never marry until I was given to another man, although he was twenty years old and I scarcely fourteen.

My brother had gone to join his comrades under the olive-trees of the square, to watch the silhouettes of the young Armenian girls going to the springs. Veiled, they passed along the road with rapid steps, their long sleeves falling back to reveal to ardent gazes the bronzed graceful arms that supported the amphoræ.

The grave figure of an old man passed them, a heavy fur cap on his shaking head, a coat of sheep's wool on his bent shoulders. A staff assisted his wavering steps. Was it our God of the Hearth, or some reincarnated magician of the long ago ?

The youths rose, and with their hands upon their belts bowed gravely, saluting Age in the person of this aged man.

I left the balcony and entered my father's library. Four rows of bound books repulsed me by their cold gravity. Near them stood tall chests of silver chiselled with little sarcophagi which ornamented the corners.

SHAMAHKA

I opened one. Before me were ancient manuscripts written in all the languages of the Orient. The verses of great poets, the tales of forgotten minstrels, the sublime pages of prophets, lay beneath my fingers. A feeling of admiration and regret seized me, admiration for my father, who knew how to read these mysterious writings; regret for myself, who could not.

Piously I gazed at the parchments, marked with cabalistic characters. How could I penetrate the mystery in these writings of past centuries, in these letters traced by forgotten Magi whose very names bowed to the earth the people of their times, whose counsels directed the fate of kingdoms?

I opened another chest filled with Armenian books. These were stories by the great Raffi. I looked at one, at another. The heroines of those stories resembled me so nearly that I felt that I was reading about myself. Lost in the contents of that chest, I read until evening blotted the pages, now smiling, now weeping with emotion. Closing the book, I pitied profoundly those ignorant of the happiness given by the poets, and morning found me again opening the chest that was for me a treasure richer than any Sindbad ever found.

It was in that library that I wrote my first letter. I have kept it. The paper is worn with age, the ink is faded, only the feeling remains unaltered, like a precious metal before which time is powerless:

“To my unknown love, greetings. I do not know thee. But thou wilt be beautiful and tender, pale with love and motionless under my glance. I love thee. I await thee. Thou art in the world. But where, in what part of the universe? Perhaps quite

ARMENIA

near, perhaps in the garden divided from mine by one thin wall. Thy name? What is thy name? I love thee! I love thee!"

Our life, apparently so happy, had its shadows. One of my five brothers, a veritable Prodigal Son from the pages of the Bible, saddened our hearts. He was constantly absent, but the whole province spoke of his tumultuous life at Dgiguit. At home we avoided pronouncing his name, so much were we pained by his extravagant adventures, which surpassed all imagining. However, we all loved him for his beautiful tempestuous nature and for his proud manners and carriage, which made us feel that an ancient bas-relief had taken flesh and blood for us.

It was he, alone of all the children, to whom my father had given a European education, following the ideas of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, whom my father had believed equal to Buddha. Tired by his great learning, unable any longer to love the little joys of life, my father completely shared the disgust which Rousseau felt for civilization, the corrupter of Nature. He had agreed with Rousseau that we should return to the primitive state and allow our instincts to develop freely, since what could be purer, more innocent, than the naked instincts uncorrupted by thought? And, according to Rousseau, if anyone possessed an evil instinct punishment was unnecessary, for he would be punished directly by the inevitable consequences of his evil acts.

Therefore, since the most natural state for the ideal man would be complete freedom, entire liberty for self-development, and the society of the unself-conscious animals, my brother had been given all of these. In

SHAMAHKA

order not to influence him with our Asiatic customs, my father kept him apart from us in a beautiful pavilion surrounded by its own gardens.

Result : after seventeen years of living, this ardent nature, true Caucasian in emotion and violence, became a veritable Bashi-bazouk. He was never without his weapons : at the slightest rousing of his anger he pursued us with his dagger ; he flogged the servants for the smallest mistakes, and if he were hungry and obliged to wait while meals were brought he tore the cloth, smashed the porcelains and, leaping upon his horse, furiously lashed it out of sight, to be gone for days and weeks.

My father, of a very sweet nature and perfectly disciplined as are all Orientals, never showed his son any anger and never punished him, knowing that his faults were the disastrous though unexpected results of his education. We saw our father, miserable, walking to and fro in my mother's room, declaring to her in agony that all Europeans are bandits and that this Rousseau, whose writings led them to liberty, is their chief. My poor mother, ignorant of the death of that Frenchman, replied through her tears, " May the sun turn cold to this Rousseau, may the washers of corpses carry him away, may no grass grow upon his grave ! "

It was Sunday, the day of enforced idleness. An intolerable, illimitable boredom weighed upon our souls. A day, an eternity, stretched empty before us. We faced obligatory visits to our elderly, severe aunts, whom my father called " Our Saints," and we, " The Pyramids." That penitential visit would follow the Mass, two hours long, which we must endure standing,

ARMENIA

our hands crossed on our breasts with an air of piety which concealed the agony of our superhuman efforts not to yawn.

Those two hours were my first revelation of eternity. In vain we counted to one thousand, in vain we repeated to ourselves the fables we knew by heart. The monotonous plaintive voices of the chanters continued inexorably, endlessly. We gazed at the dear little buzzing flies that flung themselves against the coloured window-panes ; we watched the stratagems of wicked spiders. If we could only save the flies from the spiders, what a noble act it would be ! How much greater and purer our joy in it than in any Christian effect produced upon us by the Mass ! And again we began to count to one thousand.

I admired very much the clear serenity of my father's face after those Masses, which left for a long time an incense in his spirit. Dear father, he assured us that we also wore a nobler air than ordinarily, believing that he saw in our bleak faces his own peace.

But to-day was the fête of the Resurrection, and when we reached the church there were no empty places. We must remain at the doors, pressed in the crowd which gathered behind us. This pleased us, for although we were so short that the mass of silken veils and robes enclosed us, by tipping back our heads we could see the blue sky, and with a little fidgiting we captured glimpses of the dim interior of the church. The choir was singing the Glory, the mingled voices and the scent of incense were streaming into the open air, when suddenly we heard a growl of thunder. What happiness ! Rain would release us, we would return to the house, we would not visit the aunts ! We lifted

SHAMAHKA

our eyes toward the clouds—there were no clouds! The sky was a pure and limpid blue. Astonished, we had piously bowed our heads again, when a strange thunder resounded beneath our feet, long and menacing like the bellowing of ferocious beasts in underground cages.

A quiver passed through the crowd. Heads turned, questioning glances passed from eyes to eyes, and a third prolonged growl, accompanied by a gentle shaking of the earth, unleashed our terror. It was the coming of one of those terrible upheavals of the earth that had many times reduced to ruins this city so fertile and joyful upon its volcanic hills beneath the happy sun.

“Hurry away from the walls!” said my father’s voice, troubled and stern. We were obeying, the open space before the church was a flutter of red veils, the clicking of little heels sounded like hail. Suddenly a terrible shock threw us to the ground.

I struggled to sit up. Around us lay uprooted trees, quivering as if in death. My eyes turned toward the church, and a horrible picture was printed on my eyeballs. The beamed basilica was slowly, softly sinking, like folds of cloth, upon the kneeling people. The exalted priest was leading them in prayer for a miracle. And an immense sigh, smothered and horrible, came through the open doors as the whole basilica gently closed down, and the doorposts fell. Of the great church and all that crowd of worshippers, there remained only a few columns standing amid ruins.

From all sides the crash of falling walls smothered the shrieking of human beings and animals, while the underground rumbling of the earth, in convulsions, ran

ARMENIA

through the chaos. Now and then, through the dust, we saw the rosy, hypocritical face of the sun ; then, after a momentary rest, the earth resumed its agonized contortions.

“ Pray ! ” my mother was saying, taking our hands. “ Pray : the Day of Judgment has come ! ” And she prostrated herself, repeating prayers. My lips, paralysed, capable of no words, remained motionless ; my eyes followed the naked bodies of women fleeing from the baths, and in the insanity of those moments their nakedness and their frantic gestures did not seem remarkable. Two of them were coming toward us, tottering, when the earth quietly opened beneath their feet and swallowed them, like the mouth of a monster. I lost consciousness.

A few hours of nightmare, of delirium. The air cleared itself of dust and resumed its azure colour. A gentle wind caressed the leaves of a few trees that still stood, their broken branches hanging. The sun, always indifferent, was disappearing in the distance, and the heap of ruins that had been a city still trembled from time to time, with the last quiverings of the earth's epilepsy.

No more Shamahka, no more delicious gardens, no more houses among the golden vines, no more palaces of the Khans. All was destroyed.

Of our high white house, our walled gardens, our arbours, nothing remained but a pile of stones. A broken tree laid its branches upon it as upon a grave, and from the spot where our gates had been, the water of our fountain trickled like colourless blood.

Upon the road that came from the desert, a few camels looked at us kindly through astonished eyes,

SHAMAHKA

We caressed these poor beasts, friends in our misery. In a few hours they would take us from this horrible place toward another life by the white and sterile borders of the Caspian Sea.

Armenia : *Baku*

AT the end of the summer we were living on the cape of Apcheron, in a large house amid Tartarian gardens, sterile squares of sand surrounded by high walls. Here a few fig-trees struggled to hold up dusty leaves whose strength had been sucked from them by the greedy sun. Half-covered with the hot sand, a few vine-leaves lay parched and crisp. The vines themselves were buried deep in the protecting earth ; to reach a bunch of grapes one must dig away a foot of sand. The bare stone walls burned the fingers ; the glistening sand burned the feet, and the shadows of the fig-trees were not cool. There was refuge only in the spacious house, behind the balconies protected from the sun by mats of straw. At night ladders placed against the wall led us to the roof, where we slept beneath the stars.

The Caspian Sea, smooth and shining, reflected a yellow sky. Yellow were the houses, yellow were the trees. The shores of the sea, covered with salt, lost themselves in the flat distance like clouds. Those vague white contours, uncertain in the shadows of the night, quivering in the heat of noon, expressed an indefinable melancholy.

I remember one morning, clear and limpid as the bunch of grapes my mother offered me. The sun reflected itself in the water like the golden wing of an angel. The fire of the ardent and terrible god filled my

body, my blood was liquid sunshine, my soul was as light and white as the morning.

"Kiss me, mother," I said to her. "I am so happy! Oh, tell me how I can live for ever, how I can put my arms around the whole world and press it to my heart!"

"Child," she said, and kissed me tenderly.

My mother was sad, and my father troubled. For several days we had known that they were talking together long and confidentially. So we were not at all surprised when our mother called us all together for a serious family council. In a few words my father told us that it was the will of God that we should completely alter our way of life. In a little while we would go to our European house in Baku. Forced to live in that Tartar city which had become Russian, we must altogether abandon our Asiatic customs and in the future we must be pupils in Russian schools.

That day our mother began packing away our long, light, colourful dresses. We must leave them, we must leave our gardens of sand and the white shores of the Caspian Sea, and the long days of sun-drunken idleness. Excited and a little troubled, we discussed the mysteries of Russian schools, and tried to imagine Baku.

Our hearts fell when we first saw that city. It seemed to us that, still living, we had entered hell. The ground, damp and black with oil, the black evil-smelling ponds, the monstrous buildings soaked in resinous odours, the half-naked men, blackened with smoke, who toiled like fiends in the glow of immense furnaces, the horrible noise of hammers and the shrill

ARMENIA

screaming of whistles, all that makes a city a kingdom of convicts, terrified our inmost souls.

"This is the Black City," said our father. The carriage wheels lurched over unpaved streets black with oil. With the noise of fiends in the inferno, long black trains followed each other endlessly beside the carriage windows. The men who tended them were grimed by an incessant fine black rain, their naked arms were smeared with black, and their ragged garments of skins were soaked with black oil.

The carriage passed through a monstrous forest of goblin growths—black structures standing above the wells. The earth was black, and black viscid streams moved sluggishly across it, emptying into enormous black lakes.

What joy to learn that there was also a White City, and that we were to live in it!

The wheels rattled over round cobble-stones. We were in a street of markets. Under little shelters of rugs supported by poles the merchants sat cross-legged on low, wooden divans, beside their platters and baskets of goods.

We saw again the green waters of the Caspian Sea, and, on the other hand, the grey walls of the ancient Tartar Citadel, where for ten centuries only Tartars have lived. The hill above it was covered with low houses; a honeycomb of thick white walls. Here and there in the little courts, a tree or a rose-bush struggled to live. This was the Tartar quarter of Baku.

At last, a large house, heavy and imposing—ours. Here, in the Armenian quarter, the richest part of the city, all the houses were tall and grave. Three stories high, they lifted their flat roofs above the walls of the

BAKU

courts. The tall iron gates opened for our carriage. We were in our European house.

And here, as in a nightmare, our life was transformed into a burden. The rooms, large and solemn, were filled with hideous shapes of chairs, tables and beds. The mirrors, in heavy gilded frames, hung on walls bare of tapestries. We sat upright to eat, from a table higher than our elbows, covered with a plain, severe white cloth. The mornings no longer filled us with joy. Hardly had we risen, dressed and eaten, when we must take our books and go to school.

Dressed in a grey uniform, with our hair woven into braids that hung down our backs, we felt strangers even to ourselves. We were surrounded by strange children, with broad white faces, blue eyes and thin yellow hair. Our hair, heavy, black and glistening, drew upon us their first jeers. They pulled our thick braids and called them "tails of Arabian horses," which wounded us painfully. Struck by the slender curves of our oval faces and by the melancholy expression of our large dark eyes, the kindest among them called us "Egyptian mummies."

With difficulty we restrained our rage. In turn we mocked their heavy and dull aspect and their pink soft flesh, which disgusted us as much as our more golden colour displeased them. But our retorts were weapons that turned against us; for each Armenian word that escaped our lips we were severely punished by the teachers, for it was forbidden to speak our language in a Russian school.

Deprived of luncheon for our crime, we returned to our house in the evening fainting with hunger. Consoled a little by the tenderness of our mother and

ARMENIA

by our brothers' threats against our tormentors, we listened to our father.

"In such circumstances," he told us, "do as the ancient Greeks did when ill-treated by the Romans; do not deign to reply."

We adopted this counsel, but our brothers, hardier and more violent in anger than we, beat their Russian schoolmates whenever they cried "Salty!" in mockery of our ancient custom of dipping the new-born into salt. When the teachers punished my brothers they protested, and this brought upon one of them the Wolf's Card, a dishonourable certificate which the Russian colleges give rebels; this made it impossible for the offender to receive any further official instruction.

With such daily provocation, we soon became interested in the political talk of our elders. We knew that we suffered when we spoke our own melodious language, because Baku was a conquered city. And very soon we learned the meaning of a new word that held for us all the terror that the demons had once inspired; it was the word "pogrom." When we heard that word all gaiety fell from our hearts, to be replaced by a vague horror.

Our Caucasus was then under the rule of Prince Galitzine, the Viceroy, who had promised us so much that all the Caucasian peoples had welcomed him under the name of "The Archangel." He deluged us with manifestos richly studded with the words "God" and "Tsar," in which he urged us to be perfect citizens. But these manifestos, in a manner which we did not then understand, transformed themselves into pogroms, large or small, according to the mood of the Archangel.

BAKU

Meanwhile, like a storm beyond the northern horizon, there was occurring a conflict called the Russo-Japanese War. Enchanted, we heard that these hostilities were more and more injuring the Russians. Every success of the Japanese was applauded; their victories became our own triumphs over our oppressors. All the peoples of the Caucasus were repeating, with scarcely concealed joy, the news of their own defeats. No one doubted that the end of the war would be a catastrophe for Russia, the hated power in the north which held in bondage a third of our ancient Armenian kingdom, and loomed behind both Persia and Turkey, our other oppressors.

We lived upon excitement like a drunkard upon fiery liquors, until our blood was inflamed and our heads filled with visions. The Cossacks, mounted on powerful horses, appeared in the streets. Their fierce, small eyes gleamed under tall fur bonnets, whips hung at their wrists. Students were forbidden to meet in groups of two or three, lest they be plotting. On our way to school one morning we heard screams, the clatter of horses' hoofs and the whistling of whips. We covered our eyes and ran. At night, huddled together in our beds by the light of candles, we listened while the servants told us of Cossack raids, and these stories filled us with terror and mirth.

Thus we heard that there had been found, at the home of a rich and dissipated spendthrift, two bombs. He was arrested and led through the streets, escorted by guards with unsheathed swords, and left in the dungeons of the fortress to be shot next morning. Powerful friends reached the ear of the Archangel in time to save his life, and the surprise of the Cossack

ARMENIA

commander was great when he learned that the two bombs, which no one dared touch, were the bowls of an English masseur engaged to ply his peaceful trade upon the too-round stomach of the rich man, who was anxious about his figure. Happily, the Cossacks learned the difference between medicine and munitions in time.

Even our mirth was feverish. My sisters and I dampened our pillows with tears of laughter when we heard of ludicrous invasions of our Armenian weddings, betrothals, funerals and even baptisms, by severe and heavily armed officers, who expected to find revolutions even in cradles. But the magic of vodka soothed their suspicions, and fêtes were resumed under a supervision that often became the most hilarious of the guests.

“Ah, you may laugh, my young ladies!” said the servants, shaking their heads ominously. There was no laughter in our dreams, filled with vague apprehensions and terrors, and awakening seemed a part of nightmare when at midnight we sat up in our beds, aroused by shouts and the pounding of sabre-hilts on our gates. Then, half-stupefied with sleep and fear, we ran to our mother in our nightgowns, while the tramp of heavy boots and the light of torches went from room to room. The most hidden corners of our house were searched, even to unclean laundry, kitchen utensils, beds. Amid the wails of the servants and the harsh orders of officers, our rooms were reduced to a chaos of overturned tables, emptied chests, heaps of rugs and blankets, while hurriedly we covered ourselves with any garment we could find, in order to pass the inspection of the searchers. Grumbling, they

went away at last, leaving us trembling, weeping, divided by fear and anger.

Needless to say, we took all precautions against being suspected of revolutionary sympathies. We suppressed so completely all use of the words "liberty," "revolt" or "the people" that not even among ourselves, hardly in our own minds, did we utter them. Those words, found by chance in the most innocent correspondence, or overheard in the most casual conversation, cost months in prison.

Yet even among these shadows there remained in my heart one ray of the sun, and in it bloomed a little flower, the flower of my first love.

Rahim, son of a baker, a Mussulman, poor, ragged, but beautiful with his golden skin in the golden sunlight beneath our walls—it was his eyes that kindled in my heart its first romance.

I was fourteen, perceiving for the first time the beauty of neck and arms and shadows of unbound hair reflected in the mirror. I dreamed of love, of a gallant lover, handsome and rich, who would give me the world to hold in my hands and be too richly rewarded by my smile. I dreamed of a prince, and I found him in a baker's son.

We passed his father's little shop whenever we left our gates. It stood against our wall, offering to passers-by the sight of its large black oven, its mixing bowls and floury boards, and its stacks of freshly baked loaves. On the low counter that separated it from the street, between the piles of bread, Rahim sat in his dress of black satin. He was slender and strong. Beneath his bonnet of astrakhan his eyes, a trifle slanted, were like

ARMENIA

dark topaz. His skin was golden, and his smile revealed teeth as white as milky grains of corn.

It was his smile that first made me hate, with violent hatred, the ugly grey garments I must wear to school. I wished that he might see me in my beautiful Armenian robes; I wished to conceal my face from him beneath the fluttering red veils that reveal only a sparkle of eyes and a hint of curving eyebrows. I hurried past, pretending not to have seen him.

At night, dreaming with open eyes, I said to myself, "He is beautiful. He is only the son of a Tartar baker," and in delicious pain I felt myself doomed, so young, to the tragedy of an unhappy love.

In the morning, with the bread which his father delivered to us each day, came a small Tartarian cake that I loved. In the centre of the cake was set a forest flower. It was Rahim's little gift to me, Khanoum Gueusal, the Beautiful Lady.

I looked timidly at my mother, but this delicate attention, far from making her angry, amused her very much. I laughed also, and every morning the sight of that little cake and its simple flower made me gay. I divined all the sighs that were ascending from his shop to my balcony with the odour of fresh bread and the heat of the ovens.

In the evenings when his father, after the last ablutions, wrapped himself in his burnoose and went to sleep beside his breads, Rahim transformed himself into a Medjoun lover. Crouched beside a brazier, his eyes closed, his face against the disk of a tambourine, he sang softly for entire hours the lamentations of loves without memory or hope. Those melodies, voluptuous and plaintive, rose to me through the twilight,

completing the beauty of the deep sky and the melancholy of the Caspian Sea furrowed by the beams of the moon.

Leaning against the railing on the balcony I listened, and my heart became a place of dreams. I saw myself seized by Cossacks; a brutal, hairy arm flings me across a saddle pommel, and with the speed of the wind I am carried away toward an indefinable horror. But suddenly I hear screams, shouts; the horse stumbles and falls, I hear the dying groans of Cossacks, and beside me kneels Rahim. Blood pours from a wound over his heart; he is dying. "I have saved you, Khanoum Gueusal," he says, "and I have given only my life. It is a little thing." I take his beautiful head in my lap, I press my lips to his forehead, his eyelids. "Oh, Rahim, Rahim, I love you! I have loved you always, and you never knew, and now you are dying!"

Or perhaps he was not wounded. He carried me away to safety, he knelt and kissed my hands. My life was his because he had saved it, but he was a Mussulman. "No, no, not even for you can I abandon my religion. All that is left for me is death, for happiness with you would be sin, and I cannot live without you."

All the sadness of the world overflowed my heart in the tears that fell from my lashes. Golden and black in the light of the brazier, the brooding face of Rahim was like a medallion against the tambourine, and still the music rose to me, sobbing of unutterable longings and the infinite wastes of human fate.

Meanwhile the politics of Prince Galitzine went their way. He issued an order to confiscate the wealth

ARMENIA

of our churches. The Cossacks executed it immediately. Mounted on their horses, they rode even into the sanctuaries to tear from the priests the sacred relics that they refused to give up.

The whole population, Armenian, Mussulman, even heathen, revolted against this desecration. The clergy, no matter of what religion, are revered by all the peoples of Asia. Their resentment infuriated the Cossacks, who increased their ruthlessness. But that did not prevent the miners from striking, nor the students from making demonstrations and holding meetings. A social earthquake rumbled beneath our feet. Every one plunged into politics. Even my little brother, eight years old, was "playing Cossack" from morning to night. Riding on my father's cane, he charged upon the throng of Socialists (a dozen straw chairs), lashing them with his whip and singing to the tune of the Marseillaise a song of his own composition, "God save the Tsar! Liberty, liberty, liberty and the Tsar!"

My father, catching him at this play, which too painfully reminded us of the reality, placed the culprit in a corner with his nose to the wall, a punishment which the little rebel endured bravely; it did not at all hinder him from resuming the game. And my father, his head bowed and his hands crossed, walked gravely up and down, saying, "We are on the eve of grave trouble, grave trouble."

One day our servants, returning from market, brought strange news. The Russians were buying great quantities of grain and rice in order to feed their households during the massacres of Armenians by the Tartars. Massacres? We were incredulous, imagin-

ing that such things happened only in Turkey. My father disdained to listen to such rumours, knowing the friendliness existing between the Tartars and the Armenians of the Caucasus. He feared the bloody disaster of revolution, but it was absurd, preposterous, to believe that the Tartars would attack the Armenians. "In such times, one hears anything and everything. Gusts of wind, blowing in all directions, precede the tempest."

My mother, my sisters and I were in the bath. In the little room whose wooden walls dripped with moisture, we lounged on wooden benches against the wall. Servants, barefooted and wrapped in white cloths, fed with large blocks of wood the huge Russian stove that filled three-quarters of the room, while others emptied over red-hot stones jars of cold water that instantly became steam. The hissing noises, the wide mouth of the stove, blazing like that of a dragon, the suffocating vapour and the heat made our bathing seem like a descent into Satan's realm. We lay gasping, wiping the streams of perspiration from our bodies with wet hands, and longing for the moment when, refreshed and cool in clean linens, we would lounge on the balcony in the sweet garden air, eating fruits and sherbets.

Suddenly we heard a sharp, crackling sound. We sat up, startled. "What have you done?" my mother said sharply to the servants. But they were standing motionless, as surprised as we. The sound came again, and again. Then a pattering of them, like a hail-storm.

"The massacre!" cried my mother, with white lips. The servants ran, their screams trailing behind

ARMENIA

them. In an instant we were flinging on our garments, not even stopping to dry our bodies. A profound indignation drowned in me all other feeling.

"Yes, yes," I thought. "Like miserable beasts we shall be butchered by the daggers of these villains, armed against a peaceful people that has never harmed them. And my five brothers, beautiful as young gods, will die like sheep, unable to defend themselves; they so handsome, so strong, so full of life and courage."

The house was filled with lamentations and the clatter of running feet. The high iron gates of the court had been barricaded. My brothers, with a few menservants, were waiting behind them. The crackling we heard was the rattle of bullets against the iron. Now and then, near or far away, we heard hideous screams.

The Christian resignation of my father, who, on his knees, was praying, roused my indignation to fury. "Pray, father. As for me, in the name of God and His Son, one of these villains will know the sweetness of my teeth in his throat."

With rapid steps I went through the house. It bore already the aspect of a deserted place through which terror has passed. A servant, crouched against the wall, caught at my skirts, idiotic with fear. Humanity, what a wretched thing it is! I could have set my heel on the face that shamelessly revealed such abasement. I went on. But there was nowhere to go.

Waiting was more terrible than death would have been. From time to time a fusillade of shots struck our gates, our walls. Tinkling falls of glass were heard; the windows of the upper floors were being shattered by bullets. We heard outbursts of shouting

B A K U

in the streets, the crash of breaking things and sudden stampedes of many feet. In this way the day passed, while we felt the slow approach of the moment when, the first fury of killing abated, hundreds of Tartars, encouraged by the Russians, would make a concerted attack upon us and our wealth.

Night came. They would do it in the darkness. To die in the darkness seemed infinitely terrible to me, who so loved the sun. I thought of Rahim. It was his people, the Tartars, who besieged us. All my anger dissolving into terror at last, I saw myself at his feet, begging him to obtain from them mercy for my family, in the name of Mohammed. Yes, I would give myself to him, I would give myself to a Mussulman for my whole life, only, only to be saved from death in the dark.

A kindly stupor at last came over me. I spent the night neither awake nor asleep, huddled beside my mother, my poor mother who tried to hold in her arms all her daughters at once, not knowing which of us she would, at the last, defend with her own body.

Morning. My little brother, forlorn and miserable in the midst of this terror which he did not understand, began to cry that he was hungry. It was then that we realized that there was not enough food in the house to feed us all. Betrayed by my father's too small knowledge of humanity, we had not provided for a siege, as the Russians had done. Scattering shots and screams, and the smoke of burning buildings rising here and there in the morning sunshine, told us that to venture beyond our barricaded gates meant death. My brothers, exhausted by the night of watching,

ARMENIA

slept on the stones in the court, their hands still clutching their guns. They must have food.

We women did not eat. We gave all that we had to my brothers. During that day we began to learn what hunger is. All around us the killing was still going on. Late that afternoon the house next ours was raided and all the household was killed. I saw one of the Armenian maidservants pursued across the flat roof by a drunken Tartar with a bloody knife. When I looked again he was throwing her body from the roof to the courtyard, where smoke and laughter told me that they were burning the furniture of the house.

Since our house had not been attacked, and the massacre had not stopped, we thought that the Tartars intended to starve us. My brothers threatened to rush into the street, to die after killing as many Tartars as they could. My baby brother cried all day long.

"O God! what sin have I committed against Thee, that I must suffer so?" my mother said, trying to hush him in her arms.

At nightfall I heard a tambourine jingling beneath our walls. It seemed to me like a memory of days so long past that I could only faintly remember them. It was Rahim, singing again the lamentations of love. I looked down from my balcony and saw him dimly in the shadows. His father was not there, the brazier was unlighted, the shop closed. I could not see his face against the disk of the tambourine; I saw nothing but the shadows and the moonlit half of the deserted street, where the body of some one killed two days before still lay. But I felt that his eyes were fixed on

B A K U

my balcony, and as a sign to him I put one hand from the darkness into the moonlight.

Then I saw him move into the light. He looked this way and that, and stealthily opened his burnoose to show me, hidden beneath it, a loaf of bread. He made a sign with his hand and disappeared again close to the wall.

I understood. At the risk of his life he was sending us food. He, a Tartar, whose people were killing mine! I wept.

The servants let down a rope and drew up baskets of bread and meat, while I—I promised myself never to love anyone but Rahim. Yes, if at that moment I, an Armenian and a Christian, could have married that son of a Tartar baker, I would have done it. I would have become the wife of a Mussulman and served him humbly all my life, thinking it not too much to give in return for that one beautiful act.

It was certainly to Rahim that we owed our lives, for the impatience of my starving brothers would surely have opened the iron gates to welcome a little earlier the death we awaited.

It was the second night. My mother, my sisters and I were awake at midnight, huddled together around a brazier in a little room at the head of the stairs. My little brother, enjoying the delight of not being put to bed, was playing with a box of paper soldiers, which he marched and counter-marched across his rug. Suddenly we heard running feet on the stairs, and one of our servants screamed, "The Tartars! The Tartars!" At the same moment we heard the creaking of the gates, and heavy boots in the court.

ARMENIA

In our overwhelming terror a thought, a word, was impossible. Like a madness, a desire to run, only to run, no matter where, since death was everywhere, seized us all. My mother, grasping Heguine and Zelah by the hands, fled blindly toward the stairway. Passing my little brother, I clutched him. But he, understanding nothing and enraged by being interrupted at his play, took hold of a heavy table with both hands, kicking and screaming.

“Come, come!” I said, tugging at him. He hung on with the strength of rage, crying, “I won’t leave my soldiers! I won’t leave my soldiers!” To satisfy him, I gathered up a handful of the soldiers, but he still hung on to the table. “Put them all in their box, all!” he insisted. “I will not go without all my soldiers.”

I went down on my knees and began to gather up his soldiers, throwing them into the box. The door opened, and the room seemed filled with Tartars—Tartars with shaved heads and unsheathed knives. My brother screamed. I could not see him, but thought he had been pinned to the table by their knives. I heard a voice saying, in Armenian, “Do not be afraid, sister; we are Armenians. We have come to save you.”

“Quick, quick!” said another voice. “Don’t lose time here. Where are the others?”

My brothers had opened the gates to a handful of brave Armenians disguised as Tartars, who had come to rescue us. In a stupor I followed them, and I remember only that we went stealthily through dark ways, hiding sometimes in deeper shadows on the crooked streets, and I remember a red glow of a bon-

B A K U

fire, with dancing figures outlined against it, like silhouettes of fiends.

We reached a large empty house in the Russian quarter of the city. It belonged to a rich Russian, who had offered it as a shelter for the refugees. The floors of the large bare rooms were a mass of huddled Armenians, who had lost everything, and who sat silently, with blank, staring eyes. Here and there mothers were trying to comfort their sobbing children.

From the brave men who had rescued us we learned that Prince Galitzine had had the happy thought of organizing a little series of massacres between the Mussulmans and the Christians, in order to divide them and prevent a general rising of all the Caucasian peoples against his government. The entire absence of police or Cossacks in the streets went to prove the truth of this genial rumour.

We had brought nothing with us ; we had thought only of saving our lives. This house, inhabited by misery, gave us shelter, but no food nor drink. The markets were closed, every house in Baku was barricaded ; each inhabitant was living like a mouse in its hole. The city was cut off from the world ; no peasants were bringing in food, no messages or trains were going out. The little food and water that foraging bands of armed men could find and bring back to us was divided among the children and the sick.

The house was often under Tartar fire, but none of the murdering bands dared attack us, in numbers as we were, and armed. Not all Armenians are so faithful to the teachings of Jesus that they submit meekly to their butchers ; my people, the most industrious, intelligent

ARMENIA

and cultured people in our despoiled ancient kingdom of Armenia, are as strong as any, and as brave. When they do not fight to defend themselves, it is their living religion, not cowardice, that ties their hands. Now, armed and resolute, our men were prepared to defend our place of refuge.

On the edge of the flat roof there was a little chamber, and here, in turn, each of us stayed for two hours, watching for the approach of a Tartar band. A whistle was to be the signal of danger. One night, sitting there in the darkness, I saw two shadows slipping along the opposite wall. Uncertain whether they were Armenians or Tartars, I held the whistle to my lips, hesitating to blow it.

To my astonishment, the shutters of a shop opened without a sound, and the two shadowy persons vanished behind them. Ten minutes passed, when for an instant the wind opened the shutters, and I saw by the light of a candle four men pillaging the shop, which belonged to a rich Armenian. I blew the whistle with all my breath, and the thieves fled like terrified rats.

Relieved of the watch, I found an empty corner of one of the lower rooms, and slept. A revolver shot awakened me. Running to the window, I saw against the opposite wall a young man sinking gently, as though quietly sitting down. In a moment several of our men crossed the street to examine the body. It was that of a young Georgian Armenian, sent by his avaricious mother to pillage the shop from which I had frightened the Tartars. She paid dearly for her greed, that horrible mother. For three days and nights she howled above the body of her son like a wolf above her

slain cub, beating her breast and shrieking, "It was I, it was I who killed him!"

She was still screaming when on the fifth day the Cossacks again appeared in the city. Riding down the streets on their horses, their revolvers held ready to fire, they at once, without a shot, imposed peace and order.

We returned to our house expecting to find it in ruins. As though by a miracle it had not been burned, it had not even been entered. All was as we had left it. Even the cushions still bore the imprint of our bodies, and my little brother's paper soldiers lay waiting for him. Our servants, gathering the gossip of the bazaars, explained this miracle, for which, however, we did not cease to thank God. Some one among the Tartars had spread the tale that our house was filled with bombs from cellar to roof-top. For that reason no one had dared approach it.

A few weeks passed. Rumours of new massacres began to circulate through the city. This time no one was incredulous; each household prepared for defence. Again the police and the Cossacks disappeared; again the barbarian Tartars, insane with vodka and fully armed, fell upon the Armenian quarters. Again we heard the shots rattling against our gates, and again we waited through hours of anguish that were more than could be borne, and ended in a stupor of mind and senses. The garden of our house was lighted through the night by the red glare of burning houses, and we heard the shrieks of whole households barricaded in the flames.

At the end of the fourth day the Cossacks re-

ARMENIA

appeared, bringing order and peace. Tens of thousands of dead lay in the streets and covered the Christian and Mussulman cemeteries. The odour of the corpses smothered the city. Everywhere women with mad eyes were seeking their children, and husbands were moving the heaps of rotting flesh.

It was announced that a Mass for the dead would be celebrated in the great square, and that the Governor of Baku, Prince Nakachidze, would himself honour our dead with his glorious presence.

The great square was packed with human bodies as closely as a pomegranate with seeds. The black and violet veils of the women, the coloured turbans and tall fur caps of the men, were like a mosaic laid before the open doors of the church. Because we had arrived a little late, and also because we disliked the pressure of crowds, we stood on the threshold of a little shop at one side of the square.

Preceded by an escort of Cossacks, haughty in their high astrakhan bonnets, their coloured sashes and wide blue trousers and glistening boots, Prince Nakachidze arrived with his suite. Hardly had he taken his place before the church, hardly had the choir begun the Mass, when a horrible explosion, followed instantly by many more, drowned the first notes of the *Miserere*. A groan burst from the great throat of the crowd.

A dozen bombs had fallen upon the Prince and his suite; they were dead. And hardly had we asked what was happening, when the Cossacks were let loose.

All those blond, robust horsemen hurled themselves upon us, their purple faces emitting their traditional piercing whistle, their whips hissing in the air. Like

B A K U

demons from hell their great horses, with quivering nostrils and gleaming teeth, charged neighing upon the packed masses of human flesh.

The crowd was like a carpet rolling back beneath the hoofs that stamped upon it. Pressed against the grating of the shop-front, unable to move, I saw a huge horse strike down the man beside me, tearing at his flesh with his teeth. The Cossack's face, congested with blood, glistening with sweat, set in a horrible grin, was imprinted on my vision. The horse reared back on his haunches, wheeling toward the crowd, and sprinkled me with bloody foam from his jaws.

In a few instants the square was emptied, save for the multitudes of corpses that lay upon it, heaps of rags slowly exuding blood.

That night the whole city rose in a fury no Cossack could stamp out. The leaders of Tartars and Armenians met and swore upon the Bible and the Koran to fight together loyally against the infamous Prince Galitzine. Beneath the unconquerable turmoil of rebellion there was a feast of love; in the streets Christians and Mussulmans embraced each other beneath the very eyes of the Cossacks. The government was helpless before that uprising of two hundred thousand people against its little band of professional killers.

A new governor arrived, to replace the Archangel and subdue the riots. He did not subdue them; they ceased. And at once a general strike, supported by the entire population, peacefully took the place of war. It was more terrible. For two months the oil-wells were idle, no trains ran, there was no water, no light. We lived like people in a besieged city desperately holding

ARMENIA

out against famine ; we divided carefully each day our little store of food, rigorously rationed by my father, who, as a leader of the Armenians, was supporting the strike that beggared us.

Yet not all our hours were tragic, nor even sad. The human spirit is a fountain ; no weight can wholly suppress it. Though Rahim could no longer send me the small cake I loved, his little offering of a flower appeared each morning on the small loaf of bread his father could supply us. In the evenings his tambourine still told of hopeless loves, and I—I will confess it—dreamed that some day I might speak to him. We had our happy hours in the gardens, and friends came and went as always.

One morning we were expecting some guests whom my mother had invited to drink coffee with us. The table was already prepared, with all the luxury possible. My sisters and I, dressed in our prettiest gowns, were teasing my mother, who was still in her *négligé*, when we heard in the street a sound of singing. It was the Russian hymn, “God keep for us our Tsar.”

Hastily veiling ourselves, we went out on the balcony, and saw a great procession coming down the street. A beautiful portrait of the Tsar, painted on silk and upheld on golden poles, led the way, followed by many silken banners, all carried by Russians, their heads bare and their bonnets in their hands. Behind them came a great crowd of Russians and Tartars, intermingled.

What was our surprise to see the banners and the portrait of the Tsar stop before our house, against the opposite wall, while the men who carried them raised still louder their hymn to God. The crowd became a

sea of heads beneath us; many of the men had lost their bonnets, and we easily distinguished the shaved heads of the Tartars from the long blond locks of the Russians. The hymn ended in a sudden howl, more terrifying than that of wolves. "Down with the Armenians! Death to the dogs! Death to the unbelievers!" Already the gates had given way, and the mob poured into our court.

In the hallway we were met by a manservant. "The Tsar has given them a Constitution!" he said. His stiff lips fascinated me. "Every one is free to do as he likes. That is why—that is why the Cossacks are burning the quarter. Every Armenian is to be killed."

The Cossacks hated us. Among all the Caucasian peoples we were the only cultured Asiatics, and our culture humiliated these barbarians, who could not write their names.

My mother, shaking as though palsied by cold, tried to cover my little brother with her skirts. My father, standing before us, repeated in a firm voice a prayer to God. Outside the hymn was still rising, half lost in the shouts of the mob. My heart seemed a lump of ice and I clenched my teeth, which chattered. The mob was sweeping up the stairs and filling our rooms, with a sound of smashing doors, shouts and trampling. Round pink faces of Russians and yellow faces of Tartars swam before my eyes. I smelled vodka and sweat and unwashed bodies.

Without stopping to kill us, each began to seize whatever he could. Chairs, arm-chairs, little tables, curtains, mirrors, leapt into the air and passed from hand to hand over the heads of the crowd. Furniture

ARMENIA

too heavy to lift was being smashed. A flaming torch appeared, disappeared. It had set fire to a heap of splintered wood. Already the house began to burn, but the pillaging continued in the smoke. A drunken Tartar struggled with a Russian for a tapestry that was already blazing.

My father finished his prayer and told us to follow him. But we could not get through the crowd; hundreds upon hundreds of men jammed the rooms and the stairways. The air was filled with thick smoke. From the upper storeis men were escaping by jumping from balcony to balcony, and sliding down the columns like monkeys. At intervals we still heard the song, "God keep for us our Tsar," rising from the street, mixed with cries, "Death to the Armenians! Death to the dogs!"

The mob, terrified by the fire, carried us with it down the stairway into the court. We were torn apart by the crush of bodies. I fought desperately. Somehow we got through into an open space before the gates. Suddenly I heard curious whistling sounds, like the passing of insects with whirring wings. My father tottered, and slowly sank back on me. I put my shoulder under his armpit, and held him upright. Wishing to screen him from the bullets, and having nothing, I covered him with my veil.

A few steps away the Cossacks, leaning back in their saddles, were smoking their pipes and watching the scene. I took the hem of the captain's coat between my fingers and said to him, "Brother, in the name of Christ, I beg you, save my father."

He spurred his horse and replied harshly, "To dogs the death of dogs."

BAKU

I could say no more; my throat contracted. My father was sinking; I could not hold him up. I knelt, covering his face with kisses and tears. O my father, my father! He had said to me always, "My little daughter, you must not judge the good Russians by the deeds of the Cossacks. The true Russians are generous and kind. The Cossacks are a mongrel Tartar people, barbarians from the steppes of Siberia, and that is not their fault. One must not judge them too harshly, either; they do not know what they do."

My brothers lifted my father and carried him away. Weeping, not seeing where we went or hearing the sounds around us, we followed, supporting our mother. In the poor little house of a seller of rugs we were given shelter.

My father's wound would not have killed him. But he was unable to survive all these horrors and his complete ruin, which had fallen upon him in those few hours. Not only our house, but all our wells, were burned. The whole city was in flames, and even the waves of the Caspian Sea, covered with oil from the burning wells, spat fire like the jaws of dragons.

It was thus that the Cossacks celebrated the Constitution which the Tsar gave the peoples of Russia after his defeat at Port Arthur.

In a bare small room, on a bed of rags, my father lay dying.

"Forgive me," he said to my mother. "I did not mean to abandon you thus."

My mother, unwilling to trouble him with her grief, silently kissed his hand. Her heart was so full of tears that she dared not utter a word which might make them overflow.

ARMENIA

Overwhelmed by a lethargy which weighed down my limbs and eyelids like the fumes of opium, I crouched against the wall. I felt nothing. My little brother sat beside me. He did not understand the calamities that had befallen us, but from time to time a large tear rolled from his wondering eyes, and he clenched his teeth on a sob that shook his chest. My sisters wept silently, smothering their sobs with folds of their veils. My mother leaned above my dying father, motionless as a statue, only the long folds of her veils quivered without ceasing, like the poplars when there is no wind.

A long gasping sigh was my father's last breath. My mother did not stir. "Gone! gone!" she whispered. Then, after a long silence, she swayed forward and lay with her forehead pressed to his hand. She said, "I did not know that I loved him so; I did not know."

It was the first time we had heard her speak of her love.

Persia: *Resht*

IN the terror that still held the city we could not even decently mourn our dead. My father was buried hurriedly ; his body, guarded by an escort of police, was carried through the streets accompanied by a few brave men who made their way past scattered corpses, beneath the black smoke from the burning wells. My little mother, homeless and a widow, gathered us around her to consider what should be done. Some decision as to our fate must be made at once.

“ As for you, my little daughter,” she said, embracing me tenderly, “ you are to be married to-morrow.”

This information surprised me very much. But as I learned that, even in the wreckage of our fortunes, a respected maker of marriages had found for me a husband in a young Persian, handsome, rich, and of good family, I could not help being pleased.

“ O my mother,” I said, clasping her in my arms. “ how can I bear to leave you ? ” My tears were sincere, but beneath the grief which was like a load of ashes on my heart, I felt life becoming faintly warm again. To-morrow I would escape from this nightmare of death and fear ; I would be going toward the sunshine again. I would be a bride, amid the roses and fountains of Persian gardens. This marriage was a great good fortune, and my mother was happy that our calamities had not destroyed her hopes of finding me a good husband. Even in our poverty, our name was

PERSIA

so honourable that the noblest families of Persia would receive me as a daughter.

“Be obedient, my dear daughter, love your husband and honour his people. Do not forget daily to thank God Who remembered us in our sorrow, and His blessing will be sunshine and dew upon you all the days of your life,” she said, putting aside her violet mourning veils to kiss me for the last time.

We were so poor that even her veils had been given her, and my oldest married sister had dressed me in her own garments. She was to accompany me to the church ; my mother, being in mourning, could not go, and in those days of terror there could be no marriage festivities. I embraced my mother and sisters, wrapped a dark cloak around me, and with hurried steps followed my oldest sister.

It was evening. The city was in darkness, lighted only by the moon and the red glow from smouldering fires. A few agents of the police marched beside us, brusque and impatient because of the late hour. The district was under martial law ; the streets were deserted. A few vagabond boys followed us, uncertain whether we were being taken to the prisons. They followed us across the square and into the church.

In the light of the candles upon the altar I saw three Persians, unknown to me. My heart beat painfully ; I glanced at them, seeking the first sight of my husband. He was a young man, dark-eyed and with a brow like marble ; this was all I saw before modestly lowering my eyes and kneeling before the priest, who at once hurriedly began reading the marriage ceremony. He was obliged to make haste, so that we could catch the boat that was to take us to Persia.

RESHT

I found myself for the first time on a boat, leaving behind me the land of my birth, going out into the darkness that lay upon the Caspian Sea. In a tiny cabin, where the aunt of my husband had led me, I lay in a berth and felt the ship swaying and dipping. Somewhere in it there was a beat like that of a labouring heart, and from time to time a long shudder passed through the timbers. The boat, too, was alone in the darkness, and did not know to what destination it was going, nor what awaited it there.

I thought of my husband, whose eyes were so dark and full of light beneath his white brow, and I felt in his youth a sympathy for mine. Oh, I would love him ! I would love him ardently and tenderly, and he would love me, and we would be happy. But suddenly I found that I was weeping, softly, so that my new aunt would not hear me, and my whole heart seemed to melt and flow back toward my mother and my sisters, and all the happy days that were already so far away.

In the morning, on the deck of the little boat, I walked beside my new aunt, a stern old woman who had made the journey as a patriarchal duty, and who spoke very little. Carefully concealed in my veils, I looked at the other passengers : Armenian merchants, fierce, hardy-looking men ; Greeks, swarthy and talkative ; Persians with soft eyes and melancholy smiles. Timid beneath their glances, I leaned on the rail and looked at the waters, in which the great paddle-wheels cut deep green trenches. I saw my husband approaching, his venerable uncle at his side. In passing, he smiled, and in a clear low voice said to me, " Good morning, Khanoum." I replied to him, " Good morning, Khan." Under the eyes of his uncle and his

P E R S I A

aunt, who respectively guarded us, it was impossible to say more, but I treasured the sound of his voice in my heart, which repeated it again and again.

Each morning I waited eagerly on the deck, hoping that we would meet, and each morning he passed me and uttered that greeting, to which I responded modestly. In the afternoon of the third day we arrived at that spot in the sea where its green waters mingle with the yellow waters of the Murghab river.

A violent storm was lashing the terrified waves with whips of rain. The sea rose in mountains of water. The boat tossed and rolled, as though angrily trying to shake us from its back. We watched anxiously the movements of little boats setting out to fetch us in from the sea.

Suspended in mid-air, between the big boat and the little, I felt that all the world had become battling air and water. By a miracle, at last, my feet touched solidity, unsteady though it was. Chilled and drenched by spray, I huddled beside my aunt, and watched the Tartar boatman who made our little craft glide skilfully from the summit of one liquid mountain to the next, with the words, "Ya Allah!" This robust Mongolian, high-cheeked, with slanting eyes and shaved head surmounted by a little cap of black felt, inspired in me admiration and awe. The little boat moved beneath his booted feet as though it were controlled by his will, and the sturdy torso beneath the blue blouse seemed a living part of the boat; he was a centaur of the sea.

On the quays of Enzeli, below the tall white and blue tower of the Shah's palace, crowds watched our approach. Beyond the quaint palace and the bazaars

RESH T

were beautiful forests that lay like green robes slipping from the snowy breasts of the mountains. The sky was a clear and intense blue; the bright air was a-flutter with wings of land-birds and sea-birds, and a breath of gardens came from the green-fringed shore. Before us lay the clear blue waters of Lake Murghab, shimmering silk brocaded with the green velvet of many little islands. It seemed to me that in reaching Persia I had come to Paradise.

The crowds welcomed us with cries of thanks to God and to Allah for our escape from death. They showed us gardens and houses demolished that very morning by two great dragons—for thus they name the whirling pillars of water that come from the Caspian Sea to march over the land until they meet a resistance that overpowers them. Below Enzeli these two dragons had drowned and carried away whole villages.

Without delay we again embarked in a narrow little boat drawn by Assyrians, who were to take us to Pir-Bazaar. These half-naked men, whose bronze bodies glistened with sweat, and whose bare feet strained against the boards, pulled on a rope that drew the boat onward against the strength of the current. We passed by the green islands, where we saw, drowned among trees, the wooden towers of Mongolian houses, and the square white Russian houses with red-tiled roofs. Little boats were passing from island to island to the shore, flamingos and herons flapped above our heads, and on the banks we saw the little humped Persian buffaloes grazing.

At Pir-Bazaar a hundred persons received us, firing their rifles in welcome. As I set my feet on the shore the traditional offering of a lamb, killed at my feet,

PERSIA

shook my heart. The plaintive bleat was still in my ears, when a horrified murmur from the crowd succeeded it. The blood of the lamb refused to run toward me. Disastrous omen! Happiness would elude me all my life.

My heart beat violently; through my veils I sent a pleading glance toward my husband, and it seemed to me that his untroubled air was meant to comfort me.

Two carriages, each drawn by four Arabian horses ornamented with coral and blue beads, were waiting for us. I entered the second, with the aunt. We set out on a fine straight road, paved with blocks of stone. The jolting of the carriage, the stern manner of the aunt, and the swarming fears, doubts and hopes which danced like witches in my mind, to the sound of the lamb's bleat, prevented my observing anything of the country through which we passed. But when we entered the gates of Resht my eyes were dazzled by flowers, fruits, coloured turbans, naked children, camels in gorgeous trappings, crowds of merchants, beggars, dervishes, nobles, brilliant yellows, blues, greens, beneath the burning light of the sun.

Our carriage stopped with a jerk. The carriage in which my husband rode had halted before us in a lane too narrow for carriages to pass. The aunt dismounted, I followed trembling, and we made our way on foot over an uneven pavement, accompanied by the enraged barking of innumerable dogs. High iron gates ended the lane. The thought that those stern tall doors would close me in forever made me shudder. I approached them with the emotion of a convict before the door of his cell.

They opened, and we walked through a stone passage

RESHT

and another gateway into a large garden. I saw before me a square white house, the second floor surrounded by colonnades. Below these, on the threshold, stood my new mother in her veils, and my new father, Assa-tour-Khan, grave and majestic.

Again a poor lamb was killed at my feet. Again the blood refused to flow towards me, but remained in a pool that stained red the quivering woolly body. My new mother made an heroic effort to conceal her horror of me and her anguish at this omen of misery for her son. My husband, taking her arm gently, tried to console her. "These are the old beliefs of Abraham and Isaac, my mother ; we are far from them now."

With a noble and generous manner, my new father said to me : " May your steps be light and your feet tread ways of righteousness in my house." Touched almost to tears by his gentleness, which revived my courage, I kissed the hand he offered me.

But there was no time to regain my self-control, for I found myself in a great State chamber, an immense room dimly lighted by stained-glass windows, richly draped with tapestries, and filled with a throng of strangers. Immediately I was taken into the arms of an old man who trembled from head to ankles while he poured upon my head a flood of good wishes. As he had no teeth, I could not comprehend what he was saying ; only two phrases reached me : " May you grow old upon the same cushions with your master," and, " Kiss the hands of this patriarchal family."

The gaze of three ancient ladies who were crouched in a row upon a divan eloquently told me where I should commence this rite. I approached them and, closing my eyes to shut out the sight of their

PERSIA

withered hands and blue nails, like those of corpses, I kissed the edge of their sleeves. Then quickly I turned toward the others. It seemed to me cruel that I must kiss so many cold, aged hands, from which my lips recoiled as from the touch of death. I looked despairingly at them all, and, gathering all my resolution, I stopped before an old man who stood beside my new father. His respectable appearance, his long, well-combed, white beard, and the odour of musk that surrounded him, inspired in me a little confidence. Taking his hand, I kissed it with sincere respect.

A few muffled laughs struck me like blows. My new mother said coldly, "He is our Hadji, my daughter, an old Hadji of Jerusalem." Assatour-Khan smiled broadly, and clapping the old man on the shoulder, "You are the lucky one!" he said; "you see what honours we give to faithful servants."

The old man, overwhelmed with confusion, took his hand hastily from my lips and did not reply. Some one said in my ear, "He is our watchman, an old beggar from the sacred places."

My anger and misery at being ridiculed were too much to bear. I covered my face with my veils to hide my tears, and without more words I was led into my room to be left alone.

As I was in mourning, forty days must pass before I would be brought for the first time into the presence of the young Persian who was now my master. These forty days were devoted to teaching me the duties of a young wife. For teachers I was surrounded by a number of elderly aunts and old uncles, with their parents and grandparents. Besides these, there were

RESHT

the wives of our neighbours, and most dreadful of all, the three ancient ladies, more than a hundred years old, who remained during the whole forty days motionless upon the divan in the hall of State. This great room, with its tall glazed jars ranged along walls draped with rich tapestries, its large immaculate divans covered with prim cushions, its little tables of ebony and mother-of-pearl, all stiff with propriety beneath the stains of red and blue light that fell from the coloured windows near the ceiling, became a veritable torture-chamber to me. There, standing before the three ancient ladies, I listened for hours to their advice and their instruction in the marriage laws of Moses, instruction which I must follow through all my life.

First I was forbidden ever to use the impudent words, "My husband." I must say, "Himself," or "My master." Still more strictly, I was commanded never to speak to him, nor even to look at him, during the forty days. Nor must I speak to any other member of the household; I must wait humbly to be addressed, and reply in one or two words, keeping my hands folded on my breast and my eyes downcast.

Thus imprisoned within myself, I lost hope, like a criminal condemned to solitude. It seemed to me that even at the far future ending of forty days I should never be allowed to speak freely to him, who alone of all the household was young enough to understand me, and I despaired of ever knowing the joys of love described by the poets.

Every morning, at the third crowing of the cocks, I rose from my couch by my new mother's side. With a sad heart I dressed myself in my Armenian festival robes of heavy brocaded velvet and gold or silver lace.

P E R S I A

I put on all the jewels that had been given me on my marriage day : a ring from each of my uncles and aunts, and one from each of the uncles and aunts of my husband. These rings, family heirlooms of pure soft gold carved in intricate designs and set with jewels of all colours, quite weighted down all my fingers. Around my neck the four strings of pearls with an enormous cross of diamonds, the gift of my new mother. When she presented it, one of the household had said, "That cross is very heavy, and a bad omen for a young bride. It would be better to give her the pearls without the cross." My new mother coloured, and refused to take back the cross which I timidly offered. It was indeed very heavy, and its weight on my breast was like another load for my heart to carry. "God grant that thy marriage be not as heavy upon thee as that cross," the women said to me, and every morning when I put it on I remembered those words. The cross was terrifying to me, but I wore it, in order not to wound my new mother.

As soon as I was dressed, I hastened to the court to await the appearance of Assatour-Khan. It was my duty to empty upon his head a jar of cold water, which he had the habit of enjoying every morning in order, as he said, to clear the brain. This was a service which my husband's mother had suggested to me as a delicate attention to my new father ; one of the scores of servants had formerly performed it. While Assatour-Khan dried his head, I ran to the veranda, where servants were preparing the morning tea. One of them indicated to me the proper little tray ; I took it and entered the hall of State, where, standing with respectfully lowered eyes under the gaze of the three ancient ladies,

RESHT

I held the tray until Assatour-Khan should enter.

He arrived, said good morning, and held his hand to my lips. I kissed it and waited, without moving or uttering a word, while he drank his tea. Then I handed the tray to a servant who waited for it behind a door, and from another servant I took a heavy Bible. Having read a verse from it and recited "Our Father," I awaited Assatour-Khan's commands.

As he knew by heart the calendar of the days of the saints and apostles in which our religion is very rich, he said without hesitation, "We honour to-day Saint Matthew and Saint Kirakas, as well as the luminous spirit of Saint Karapet."

He installed himself on a divan, and I prepared to read for three hours from heavy books written in the Armenian of the Middle Ages, which I repeated perfectly without understanding one word. Happy to find me so enlightened in the scriptures, my new father was not sorry to find a few evidences of negligence in my education, as he was flattered by his ability to remove them.

"My daughter, I find that your knowledge of the rites of our religion leaves much to be desired. Therefore I wish you to learn by heart the marriage service and the service for the dead, as well as the Christmas and Easter Masses."

"Yes, my father."

"And now you will recite for me the genealogy of the family of Noah."

I clasped my hands more tightly. My knees trembled beneath me with weariness and apprehension. In a low voice I began, uttered a few words, faltered and stopped. I could not remember all the names of

P E R S I A

Noah's great-grandchildren. My head was bowed, but I felt the cruel glances of the three ancient women.

"My daughter," said Assatour-Khan, in a kind but firm voice, "to be ignorant of the two hundred and forty-four names of the fathers of Abraham is to be ignorant of our own origin. You will repeat them after me, striving to imprint them indelibly upon your memory."

He began to recite the names, and I repeated them faithfully. Seeing him confuse the Abet branch with that of Shem, I said nothing, but respectfully followed him in his errors.

Without boasting, I may say that in a little time I had learned so well the generations of the descendants of Noah that when I awakened in the middle of the night I could recite in one breath, without even shaking off my sleepiness, not only the two hundred and forty-four names, but those of their legitimate wives and of all their concubines by whom they had children.

Delighted by this brilliant progress, Assatour-Khan one day gave me a string of amber beads to which, he told me, I might add miraculous powers by fasting for fourteen days and repeating twenty-four prayers a day, one for each hour.

"But, my father," I had the courage to ask humbly, "must one eat nothing at all during all that time?"

"One may eat a very little," he replied, "but no meat, milk, honey nor fruit."

Such a penitence seemed more than I could endure, I who so loved fruits and had never passed a day without eating quantities of them. However, knowing that his praises of my efforts had become known through the whole province, and wishing to win his heart com-

RESHT

pletely and to overcome entirely the bad omens of my entrance into his household, I condemned myself to the task.

My resolution was praised by the whole family. When we assembled on our divans to eat together in the large room that opened from the hall of State, the old Hadji came to sit beside me and share my fast. He highly commended my desire to taste the joys of a pure spirit devoted to God, and I endeavoured to turn my thoughts from worldly things. But it was hard to keep the tears from my eyes, which in spite of all my efforts would rest on the platters of savoury meats, the jars of fruits and melons, the piles of honeycomb and the heaps of saffron-scented rice that covered the long table at our knees. It seemed to me that I might have been more filled with love of God if I could have tasted those.

One midnight, having awakened to say the prayer for that hour, I was falling asleep again when suddenly I felt the earth shaking. I heard the laughter of demons and the shrieks of women. I clutched the coverlets around me, staring into the darkness, and I saw the door slowly opening. Something red appeared in it; it was the red beard of a Tartar with shaven head, and in an instant I was surrounded by yellow-skinned men who seized me in hairy claws. I screamed, but my throat made no sounds, and I flung myself frantically upon my mother-in-law, shrieking in a whisper, "Save me! Save me!"

The poor woman held me in her arms, calling for lights and invoking all the saints. When the terrified servants ran in with lamps there were no Tartars, and

P E R S I A

I was very much confused. The next day my mother-in-law announced to all the household that I had seen spirits in the night.

The following night it was a Cossack who woke me with his shrill whistle and, holding me down, tried to bury his teeth in my throat.

It was decided to call the hakims, with whom Assatour-Khan discussed my malady. They said that fears had made the soul of my brain fly away from me, and they counselled that I should at once be taken to see spectacles which would divert me.

One of the uncles of the household offered to take me to the bazaar, which that evening was blazing with torches in honour of a great fête. I venerated this uncle more than any other, because he had travelled in the civilized magnificent lands west of the Black Sea. Some years earlier he had made the journey to see those "countries of light" with his own eyes, and a reminiscence of that marvellous experience was seen even yet in his costume. Over his *arcacalouk*—the Armenian robe of satin gathered at the waist by a silver girdle—he wore the *coat*, a European garment of thick cloth that would have appeared to me ugly, had it not been haloed by the glamour of its origin. His adventurous spirit quailed before the European head-covering, which he admitted to be monstrous in its hideousness and its discomfort, and he wore the customary tall bonnet of astrakhan, but his feet were clad in American *shoes*. These, and the *coat*, he considered sufficient to show the world that he was a civilized man, who knew the Western world. I felt profoundly the honour of being accompanied by such a man, and when, turning to me, he said, "God grant

RESHT

you to-night such amusement as will drive the evil spirits from you for ever," I felt myself already restored to health.

Truly there were many things that amused me, and this change from the severe life behind the gates to the light, colour and movement of the bazaar made me gay. It was almost impossible to get through the crooked streets, where the walls were like banks, too narrow to allow the streams of people to pass. At every instant we were halted ; beggars, gypsies, handsome men in turbans jostled us, and at a cry the mass swayed this way and that to let a richly decked camel go by, undulating his long neck and showing the venomous gaze of a serpent between his half-shut lids.

In the wider spaces we stepped carefully past heaps of silks, embroideries, cakes, jewelled ornaments, spread on little rugs beside which the merchants crouched. Sweetmeat-sellers bargained over trays of figs, dates and fruits glazed with bright red syrup that shone like great rubies. Here were puppets dancing upon a cord ; there was a fakir, cross-legged on the ground in a ring of spectators, making a tree grow from a seed, bud, blossom and fruit, where no tree was. Snake-charmers swayed beside their tripods, while bright-eyed snakes whose tongues quivered like jets of smoke wound themselves around bare neck and arms. The shrill sound of a little pipe was calling the hooded head of a cobra from a basket for his Indian master. And above the heads of the crowd, which moved like grain in a wind, one saw the grey back of an enormous elephant, on which monkeys were performing tricks.

But it was the sound of thars and tambourines which

PERSIA

drew me. We came to a platform where two musicians accompanied the movements of a little dancer who crouched before them. Her hair was dishevelled, her small face seemed aged in its youth, and while she sang a plaintive air her body moved with the rhythm of the melody, like the contortions of a wounded serpent. There was so much suffering, so much revolt in her gestures, now frantic and angry, now weary and heart-sick. Without saying a word she expressed all her experience of the villanies, the ingratitude, the cruelty of humanity toward one who has no longer anything to give.

She finished the dance and held out her tambourine to the crowd, with a gesture asking only a few pennies. The bystanders, laughing, rewarded her with handfuls of refuse. A rotten egg smashed in the tambourine, to the joy of the crowd, a few pebbles followed, and many insults. She shrugged her shoulders and, as if she had heard nothing, coldly looked at the throng. Her eyes met mine, and in that instant I saw all the misery in which she lived, disdained by those to whom yesterday she was throwing her youth with open hands. She turned away, covered her face with her hair, and rested a moment before beginning another dance.

I tugged at my uncle's sleeve, begging him to take me away.

"Yes, let us go," he said. "You are right. Why should we look at this lost girl? There is nothing in the world more impious than a dancer."

He advanced toward a throng that surrounded a dozen dignified men seated on a carpet. "This will amuse you, my child. Here justice punishes crime and teaches a moral lesson to the people. It is the

RESHT

tribunal where the orders of the Vizirs are carried out in public."

The crowd recognized our servant who went before us, and elbowing right and left it separated to give us the place of honour, two small pieces of dirty carpet beside several old men who smelled of onions. Concealed by my veils, I awaited with curiosity my first sight of the working of justice.

A man, weeping and holding his right hand against his breast, came toward us from the row of judges. I thought at first that his hand was broken, but seeing him kissing it tenderly while the spectators laughed, I asked my uncle what this meant. Laughing also, he answered, "He is a thief, my child; may the washers of corpses carry him away! He has stolen with that hand; now it will be cut off. That is a spectacle worth seeing!"

I could not believe my ears, but at that instant I saw another man beside a small block, laughing while he sharpened a hatchet.

Trembling, I hurled myself through the crowd, followed by my shocked uncle. He was outraged by my extravagant conduct, which had cost him the sight of that spectacle, and very much grieved he took me back to the house.

That night I awoke to find that my hands had been cut off at the wrists. I could not control my shrieks, and while my mother-in-law called upon all the saints to quiet me I went from one spasm of horror into another.

This proved to every one that the hakims had been ill-advised, and an old magician well known to the servants was summoned. This wrinkled old woman,

PERSIA

bent double, came supporting herself by a staff and listened to the story of my strange obsessions. Evil spirits had taken possession of me, she said, and after hanging talismans about my neck, my wrists and my ankles, she ordered that I be led dancing to the tombs of the saints. The spirits, made wretched by my rapid movements and the sharp sounds of the cymbals, would leave me, and when they sought to return, the talismans would prevent them.

But the evil spirits did not leave me. I returned to the house trembling with exhaustion, and fell into a stupor during which I moaned without ceasing.

As a last resort, a remedy advised by the three ancient ladies was tried : without my knowing it I was given the urine of one of my aunts in a drink of spiced wine. But as this did not restore my health, the household despaired, and sent to a neighbouring province for a wise man whom every one believed to be a prophet.

He was brought into the great salon where, covered with my veils and supported by my mother-in-law and aunts, I received him. He was a dervish, a handsome man about thirty years old. His body was bare and bronzed by the sun, a camel's skin covered his hips. Thick curling hair made a natural turban for his head, and his gaze, disdaining those around him, was fixed on the distance. Standing before us, resting on his staff, he bore himself with a haughty air, not replying to the questions which my elders asked. When he spoke, his words fell from his lips like pebbles.

“What was the day and the year of her birth ? What was her name in her infancy ?” He wrote the replies on a tablet taken from the folds of camel's

R E S H T

skin. Then, stopping in front of me, he looked at me for a long time, and said as if to himself, "The heart of this child cries out for joy, song, and green fields under her eyes."

Oh, how happy I was to see that some one understood what I lacked!

Without another word he went away. At the end of three days he returned, having studied the stars under which I was born.

"Her destiny will lead her through all the lands of the earth. She will not remain long in any place. Great crowds will acclaim her name, praising her in many strange languages. I have seen the high houses where she will live. She will live for some time in a city without wells. She will never be sick, but gloomy skies will darken her spirit. The numbers 3, 7 and 9 will never be unlucky for her."

He departed, refusing all gifts and leaving me troubled. "Great crowds will acclaim her name." The baffling obscurity of this prediction completely upset my thoughts. What could it mean?

At last I seized upon its hidden sense. No doubt, though I was married, I would live a virgin until my death. Our church, to recompense me, would add my name to those of the saints, and Armenians in crowds would come to salute my tomb, glorifying my name in psalms.

I fell asleep that night to dream quietly of fountains and green grass and peace.

What was my astonishment at the news that greeted my waking! The nuptial bath was being prepared for me; I would be received that night in my husband's

PERSIA

apartments. This was done by order of the prophet, who had also commanded that my religious instruction be stopped. Dear, dear prophet, who alone understood me! I resolved that if at some distant day I should renounce a worldly life I would follow him as a beggar in his pilgrimages.

Accompanied by young girls of my own age, and by the elderly women who were to bathe us, I was taken to the baths. From the court we saw only a low dome of coloured glass, like a bed of dull flowers. A narrow stairway led us underground to a star-shaped room. Its walls were entirely covered by tiles of enamel, painted and ornamented by Persian writing. These were the verses of Ferdousi, illustrated by famous artists. Had we had time to read them all, we would have come from the baths knowing all of Persian history.

Benches covered with rugs followed the outline of the walls, and sitting upon them, chattering like sparrows, we undressed ourselves. Lengths of striped silk were given us, and tying them about our hips we went into the next room, where walls of heated stone surrounded a pool of warm water. We sat on the edge of the pool and dabbled our toes in it while the bathers let down our hair. Then we passed into the next room, as large as a mosque.

The vaulted ceiling was supported by square columns of stone that radiated heat. In niches of the walls five lions' heads of bronze poured boiling water into five bronze bowls. A breath of freshness coming from the sixth niche indicated the kindly lion whose jaws yielded cold water. In the distance an oblong of yellow light was the doorway of a small room illu-

RESHT

minated by a lantern, where the bathers removed from the bodies of older women everything that reminds us of our origin from monkeys. But our adolescent bodies treated with contempt the mysteries of that room.

Lounging upon carpeted slabs under the rays of the sun, golden and green and red, that pierced the coloured glasses of the dome, we let all the hours of the day trickle between our idle fingers.

First, the bathers soaped our hair and left it for some time in foamy turbans on our heads. When the soap was washed away the hair was dipped in henna and left wrapped in reddening cloths. After the henna, which strengthens the roots, women rinsed the hair for an hour and covered it with curdled milk, which nourishes the scalp. After another interval, came another hour of rinsing and an hour of drying and combing. Then the hair, dipped in rose-water, was braided.

It was noon, and in another room luncheon awaited us on little copper platters. We went happily, eager to taste the cooler air and to feel beneath our bodies the freshness of divans covered with woven straw. To our dismay, the bathers feared our being chilled, and compelled us to return to the bathroom for our dessert, goblets of sherbet and trays of fruit. Then we rested for a while, stretched out on the hot rugs moist with steam, while the servants brought the kalia.

For the first time I tasted the scented smoke drawn from the tiny bowl, through the bubbling water perfumed with attar of roses, and through the long pipe to the silver mouthpiece at my lips. It brought me a delicious sensation of age and experience. I lay on the

P E R S I A

rugs, drawing deep breaths of the smoke and letting them curl from my lips to mingle with the steam in the rays of coloured light, and realized all the dignity of my fifteen years. But in a little while I felt dizzy, and gladly let the kalian be taken from us by the bathers.

Our bodies were abandoned to these vigorous old women, girdled with white, whose bare skin shone with steam and perspiration. They massaged every muscle, made all our joints creak, beat our flesh, dipped us into warm water and then into cold, soaped us till we lay in mountains of foam, rubbed us with curdled milk, finally rinsed us for two hours in water scented with herbs, and at last, with the words "Ya Allah!" allowed us to escape into the large pool of perfumed water, while they retired into another room.

They had every difficulty imaginable in persuading us to leave the pool two hours later, because, sitting on the edge of the basin and eating oranges, the young girls were telling such amusing stories that we were exhausted with laughter. Attracted by our gaiety, the servants came in from time to time to share it and to tell stories of their own. Night had covered the glass dome with darkness, and the lanterns were lighted, long before the bathers coaxed and scolded us into our clothes, and my nuptial bath was ended.

In the little room I had shared with my mother-in-law the girls dressed me in my wedding garment, warning me that next day the old women of the household would take it to show to all the women of the city as proof of my virginity, a warning which made me naïvely regret that I had not been violated during the massacres, in order to escape such ceremonies.

Finally I was led to my husband's apartments, where

RESHT

the young girls left me, alone and a little confused. I found myself in a small chamber draped with sombre cashmeres. In a corner behind a curtain of tapestry I saw mats and cushions arranged on the floor, and before them a few bottles of Shiraz wines and several silver platters of cold meats wreathed with flowers. These were revealed in the glow from the brazier, and by the feeble twinkle of a lamp of pierced silver that hung from the draped ceiling.

It was here that my master, coming from his bath, would meet me alone for the first time. The idea of showing him a delicate courtesy at this first meeting came to me naturally, and I resolved to touch nothing in the room until he came. A tremendous weariness, too great to be told, had fallen upon me after the fatigue of the bath. I longed for a swallow of wine, but not wishing to disarrange the feast or the cushions, I resigned myself to waiting beside the brazier.

Painfully balancing my body upright above my folded legs, I watched the fantastic contours of the flames. I imagined the entrance of him whom I awaited. I tried to divine his first words, his first gestures, his first embrace. At intervals my heart stopped; each sound from without clutched it, then released it to beat hurriedly, announcing his arrival. But the door did not open.

Suddenly, with a gasping flicker, the lamp went out. I asked myself how long I had waited. Had the lamp drunk all its oil, or had a careless servant forgotten to fill it? I did not regret its light, for the shadows moved among the draperies with a mysterious air that pleased while it half-frightened me. It was the fire in the brazier that distressed me; it slowly covered itself

PERSIA

with ashes. A chill crept through the perfumed air, and my teeth chattered. I hugged my body with my arms to quiet its shivering.

A fearful thought stabbed my heart ; the bath, filled with smoke, might have smothered my poor master. My blood turned to ice. I saw his body stretched out upon the slabs, his face like white marble ; I saw the servants carrying his shrouded body into the room of State, and the three ancient ladies leaning forward like vultures from their divan. Here he lay in his coffin ; the earth received him ; the rain fell upon his tomb.

O God, I have not yet had an opportunity to sin, for what sin of my ancestors dost Thou punish me so cruelly ! What have I done to Thee, that Thou art become a monster toward me ? Bring back my husband, my husband without whom I cannot live, and I will for ever adore Thee, I swear it by Thy sun !

I walked up and down the room. I crouched near the door, putting my ear against it and listening. No sound. No light. No hope. O God, he is dead !

The last glow from the brazier vanished, leaving me alone in darkness. I strained my eyes, I crept towards the brazier, hoping to find one coal, just one little coal to keep away the darkness. But the darkness was filled with Tartars, Tartars with foul hairy claws. O Heaven ! I felt them on my hair, on my veils. I saw the lights of their eyes. No, it was the glimmer of a candle. The door opened, and a ghost entered. I recognized him ; it was the spirit of my dead father. He entered, closing the door behind him.

Crouched in the folds of the curtains, my head squeezed between my knees, I screamed. And while the scream tore from my throat as though my soul went

RESHT

with it, I felt hands on my shoulders. It was my dead father who dropped the candle, who seized me as if to strangle me, and who cried, "It is I. It is I, your husband!"

But nothing any longer existed for me. A fever had seized my brain, and when I opened my eyes I found myself on a balcony above a rose-garden. My husband, kneeling beside me and kissing my hand, told me tenderly that two months had passed since he found me delirious, and that we were in a little palace of the Vizirs at Teheran, where he had brought me to be cured.

Persia : *Teheran*

I FOUND myself, then, at Teheran with my master in the house of a former Vizir, killed by his rival at the dawn of a night of love. I found myself among the roses of my dreams, in the sunshine of gardens cooled by fountains and shaded by trees in which birds sang at dawn. Beside me was my young husband, grave, serene, handsome as a hero of the poems that had taught me to dream of love. His eyes were like dark pools in the shadow of caverns, his forehead was white as alabaster, his profile was chiselled like that of the antique gods who live to-day only in marble, majestic, severe, and breaking the heart with their beauty.

I loved him. I adored him. My soul became a limpid stream at his feet. When I touched his cheek timidly with my hand he trembled, and I knew the rapture of a surrender so complete that it is conquest.

When he had gone I sent quickly for mirrors. I longed to be beautiful for him. Fever had worn my cheeks, but my eyes, large, dark and brilliant, looked at me from the silver pool, promising me delights that made me blush with happiness. I sent for slaves to brush back the gleaming into my hair ; I sent for perfumes and silks. Life poured again through my veins, warm and intoxicating as the rays of the sun.

My cheeks rounded, my arms regained their curving lines of amber and rose. My feet danced on the garden paths. I was beautiful, I was young, I was loved. In the moonlight, on the balcony above the roses, I lay

TEHERAN

beside my husband, so happy that the eternal joys of Paradise would not have tempted me to give up one glance from his eyes.

But the intoxication of his kisses was to me an intoxication of fever, of longing. Something in him eluded me. I was troubled, and humble. Was I not good enough, was I not beautiful? Oh, how devotedly, how passionately, I would try to be worthy of him!

"Do you not love me?" I murmured.

"I adore you," he said, in a thick and trembling voice. What was it that I could not reach? What was it that I felt fleeing from me, that escaped my longing?

He talked to me of God, of the beauty of Christ Who had given His life for the world, and I worshipped the nobility of his soul and his tenderness which, like that of Christ, was great enough to cover all the earth. His eyes were lighted with visions, he saw a beauty beyond all the beauty that I knew, and I remained silent by his side. As for me, I was only a small wife, a woman; I worshipped God best in His sunshine, His dawns, His small birds and flowers and His perfect handiwork, my husband.

I was happy. I was so happy! God had given me so much that all my life would not repay Him. Morning and evening and before every meal, while my husband prayed, I thanked God in my heart. He had given me so much. What was the little, little thing I lacked? Perhaps it was the complete love of God which should fill my heart. But my heart was already so filled with love for my husband, and surely God meant me to love the husband he had given me?

I was quite well again, all my body was filled with joy

P E R S I A

of living. But a strange fever consumed my soul, and at night I lay awake, burning with it, like a traveller in the desert tortured by thirst.

My husband wished me to know our neighbours. So, although I loved my gardens, where swans as white as snow and as black as ebony drifted across the smooth pools beneath cascades of willow branches, where the paths were bordered with flowers and the sound of running water accompanied the songs of birds, although I should have been for ever contented to stay in them and in my dusky rooms draped with cashmeres, where I lay on divans soft as the breast of doves and little tables inlaid with silver and pearl offered me, in copper jars, heaps of ice-cooled grapes and pomegranates and figs, I must leave them all to visit strange people. Dressed in my robes of soft silks, adorned with all my jewels, I covered myself with veils, and preceded by servants I ventured from my gate to the gate of the garden that adjoined ours.

It was the garden of General Sasso-Tates, an Armenian "man of the world," that is to say, in Persia as in Europe, a man who moved easily in Society in his own city. He was not only a military man, he was also a merchant who dealt in rugs, old potteries, ancient silver and gold ornaments. More than that, he was one of the most successful usurers of Persia. He was well received everywhere, because in everything that did not concern money he had the best of hearts, being always in a good humour and ready to drink with anyone. His two oldest sons were already Cossacks, and always wore their arms—rifles on their shoulders, daggers and revolvers at their belts. These weapons were removed only while their wearers slept or ate. At dinner, when

TEHERAN

we assembled around the cloth, the two young men unfastened their belts and laid them aside, so that the revolvers and knives would not bother them while they squatted to eat. They were hearty men, who laughed easily, and while we women spoke little—and I did not find the wife of General Sasso-Tates, mother of his ten children, very sympathetic to my younger spirits—I enjoyed well enough a dinner in her house.

As etiquette required, I returned her calls from time to time, and visited a few other women of the exclusive Armenian harems.

But I always returned gladly to my own house to await my husband, sun of my existence, whose glances, like the rays of the sun, both warmed and parched me.

We had been together six weeks. It was dawn. The first twittering of the birds had awakened me, to find myself alone. Unable to sleep again I rose, bathed my face and hands in perfumed cool water, and put on a simple gown of thin white lawn. From the balcony I saw my husband walking in the garden. I hesitated, and then went to meet him.

He stood beside a little fountain, where white marble loves played in the spray. When he saw me, he turned his head away, and I stopped, wounded, ready to flee back into the house, but before I could do so he was coming toward me. In a firm voice he told me that he had a sacred task to accomplish. He wished to speak to me about it. He led me to a marble bench beneath a rose-tree.

I knew, he said, that the world is filled with crime and injustices. The hands of men are cruel against their brothers; hate and envy and greed fill their hearts. The poor die of hunger, the rich murder their

PERSIA

own souls with luxury. If the world is to be saved, it must be re-created, it must be made new again by the power of Christian love.

The time was approaching when this would be done. Justice would come. Terrible as an army of the Lord, justice would dethrone kings, drive the nobles from their palaces, destroy the idle, the cruel and the self-indulgent. There would be no more kings nor slaves, no more palaces, no more temples nor mosques. Cleansed of all human passions, simple in spirit and pure in heart, mankind would taste the joys of Paradise. The earth would become God's heaven.

This idea overwhelmed me. I sat motionless, unable to speak or think, and I saw the rose-petals falling slowly, with little lifts and quivers, toward the earth.

"Soon," he continued, "we shall abandon this luxury, I shall be free. I shall go to rouse unhappy souls and to awaken their just anger against the miseries and crimes of the world. The righteous anger of man is the flaming weapon of God. Its fire will devour this rotten world, and from the ashes will rise another world in which the first shall be last, and the last first."

"When?" I asked, trembling.

"Soon," he replied.

My paradise vanished like a mist, and with it all the joy in my heart. The few words that I had understood terrified me. I melted into tears.

"O God!" I cried, "Thou Who existest in Heaven to accomplish our desires, make me blind before this calamity! Hide me under the earth! I would not know how to live with a perfect humanity. I love the world that Thou hast created, the world Thou deignest to support as it is. O Celestial Commander,

TEHERAN

leave me my master, my cushions, my dear negroes with gentle eyes who kiss my garments when I caress their children! Do not take from me my gardens, my roses, my birds! O God, it is so little that I ask of all Thy great world!"

But God was deaf. And I learned that my dear master, whom I adored, had left his parent's home by the door of marriage only that he might be free to begin his pilgrimage for the salvation of the world. As he was only nineteen years old, and as unmarried sons, of whatever age, are always considered part of their father's household and subservient to the wishes of the elders, he had been unable to start on his holy mission, of which Assatour-Khan would not hear two words. Only marriage would free him. As master of his own household, he could do whatever he desired. That was the reason he had ceased to talk of his plan for saving the world and begun to speak of marriage. That was the reason he had married me. He had not thought that he would love me. Our love had been a temptation that had delayed his soul upon its way, but he had conquered it.

Alone upon the floor of our darkened rooms, I wept until I had no tears. My heart was a broken fountain.

In a few days my master called our slaves together, and dismissed them all. They were like sheep deprived of a shepherd. Old Tahia, whose shrunk black hands had combed my hair and tried to soothe my agony, prostrated herself at his feet and begged him not to deliver her to liberty. He allowed her to remain with me.

"As for you," he told me, "you shall return to my father's house at Resht."

P E R S I A

But I also fell at his feet and begged him not to condemn me to that. I prayed him not to send me back to that house whose very memory made me shudder with cold. I begged him with tears to be so kind as to leave me to die by the roadside, so that I might die in the sun, and free.

Weeping with me, he granted my prayer. He gave me a handful of the gold for which he had sold all his property, intending to devote it all to the salvation of the world. As gold meant nothing to either of us, I did not think of it again. I thought only of my beloved husband. And he, my husband whom I worshipped, led us into the poor quarter, installed us in a bare hut, and left for the frontier of Turkey to save humanity.

Nothing existed any more for me, neither the sky nor the earth. In losing him, I had lost the light of my eyes. There remained only one thing to do, to die. But how? I would drown myself in a pond. No; the djinns live there and make the dead their mistresses. A ball, a little round ball of steel, that would be better. The house of General Sasso-Tates was full of arms. . . .

Tahia arranged my hair. The smooth black curves of it lay like strokes of ink above my feverish eyes. I painted my lips, my cheeks. I clasped my bracelets on my arms. Tahia straightened the folds of my veils. We went to the house of General Sasso-Tates. We arrived just at the end of dinner, and I was asked to share their coffee. The Cossack sons had laid aside their belts; a heap of knives and revolvers lay in a corner of the room. Unobserved, I took one of the revolvers.

TEHERAN

I came back to the hut, the hard shape of the revolver pressed against my side, beneath the veils. Alone, I held it in my hand. One instant of resolution, and it would end all my pain.

I pressed it against the beating of my heart. A tumult filled me, like the roar of a mob. A million little voices clamoured in my blood, in my body, crying out against death, shrieking to live, only to live. I pulled the trigger, and felt myself falling.

Some one was gently caressing my cheeks. Was it my master? I opened my eyes. It was my dog. I shall never forget his look; humanity, such as I had imagined it to be, was in his eyes.

"Why have you done this?" he was saying to me. "I love you."

Some one had extracted the ball from my chest; some one had carried me to the hospital—the hospital, dreaded by all Asiatics as the tomb itself. Bare white walls were around me. I lay motionless and silent. I did not wish to live, and the ways of God seemed to me meaningless.

The door opened, and I saw approaching the comical silhouette of General Sasso-Tates. His bald head shone like the egg of a roc, his fiery moustache hung almost to his silver belt, his uniform was covered with medals, his hand on the hilt of his sword.

He seemed deeply moved. "Now, now," he said, "do not speak, it is forbidden you. Listen, my eaglet," he continued, sitting on the edge of my bed. "I am an old soldier experienced in combats. There is nothing more sublime to me than courage, my little vulture. It is I—I, the General Sasso-Tates—who says it. You are a tiger, a lion, a very panther, and if

P E R S I A

you were dead, I would make a funeral for you that would surpass all imagination. I would take your body into my own house, I would cover it with the most expensive fabrics, I would hire innumerable mourners, and all the priests of Teheran. After you were buried, for the funeral meats I would sacrifice a hundred sheep. In my gardens a feast lasting seven days would be served to the poor, and their prayers would bribe the angels to find a place for you beside the Great Judge and all the Trinity. But"—and he sighed with sincere regret—"you are not dead."

His expression was so grieved, his desolation at finding himself deprived of this unique occasion to show the world his great generosity was so profound, that a laugh contracted my poor chest. Drops of blood appeared upon my lips.

"God, Christ and all the saints!" cried the general, turning pale. And he fled.

Later I was told that General Sasso-Tates had presented himself at the hospital as my protector, but that on being shown the bill for the care given me he had uttered a long discourse, seasoned with sighs, declaring that he had suffered a great reverse of fortune, and that he would soon be on the streets begging, with his wife and children. After this, he left without paying a penny, and was not seen again. But I had no reproaches for him, for that laugh had mysteriously restored to me a willingness to live.

I lay alone all day in the hospital. The very name of this place, the only hospital in Teheran, was abhorred by the people, and with reason, since one received there very little encouragement to live. I found nothing but

TEHERAN

emptiness, heat, and the unbearable glare of the unshaded sun on whitewash. A jar of water was left beside my bed by the attendants, who lived in another house at some little distance, where they slept or amused themselves during the day. At morning and evening they came to bring me food from their own house. I passed the day with my head beneath the blankets, which were my only shade, and from time to time I dipped my fingers in the water-jar and moistened my lips.

There was only one other patient, a little negro nine years old, who had been bought by the wife of an ambassador to Persia during a visit in Koum. After having him castrated, the lady had taken the little cunuch to Europe with her, so that she might appear in Paris and London as a real Sheherazade.

At the end of a few weeks he spat blood, and was sent to die in Persia.

I pitied this little negro, so quickly destroyed by the civilized countries, and tried to cheer him with conversation. He avowed that he had so hated everything European that he had stubbornly refused to eat their dishes or to speak a word of the barbarous language. He described to me the coldness of everything in those lands ; the eyes, the voices, the manners of the people were cold, the houses were cold, the streets were covered with snow, and even the sky, in which the sun never shone, was a cold grey. This sky often descended into the streets, so that the air itself was grey. One could not see ; a cold breath as of the grave chilled even the cold blood of Europeans ; Death himself walked there upon the earth.

One day his voice had hardly strength enough to

P E R S I A

reach me, and seeing that he was so nearly dying, I said to him, "Perhaps your heart wishes something, Kara. Tell it to me, I am your sister."

"Take me to Koum. I want to die near my mother," he said.

But this was impossible. He sighed, then, leaning on his elbow, he fixed his naïve gaze upon me and said, "Then please tell these French that I shall soon die, and ask them to take away the bitter liquids that they force me to swallow night and day, and let me eat some kebab."

That night, after many supplications, the attendants finally consented to let the little Kara die as he wished, while eating some kebab.

When an old negro carried away his body wrapped in rags, I, too, like little Kara, felt a profound hatred for all the great ladies of Europe.

The intolerable sunlight made even the contours of the walls dance. The air, agitated by waves of heat, appeared like boiling water. In the hospital there were no cool underground vaults to shield one from the terrible gaze of the sun. Tottering, I crept from my bed and crawled in search of some refuge. An operating-table furnished it. Tahia draped it with blankets, making a tent in which I crouched. The attendants, coming at night, made no objection to my plan. I spent my days in this shelter, where I found shade, fresh water and fruits. A ray of light passing through the drapery fell upon the love-poem of Leily and Medjnoun which I read. Suddenly I heard steps in the room.

They were those of a young Persian woman with

TEHERAN

features as clear-cut as those of a mummy. An expression of great fatigue shadowed her noble face. I recognized "The Queen of the Crowns," celebrated for the great beauty which she was willingly destroying by the opium that made her forget her sorrows. Her story was known to all Persia.

She was a Persian princess, closely related to the Shah. According to the custom of her people, when she was eleven years old she was married to a young prince of the court, and taken to his house to live until she should be old enough to become in reality his wife. Surrounded by the women of his household, in the gardens and apartments reserved for their use, she heard nothing but praises of his beauty, and nourished her heart on dreams of him and his love. From time to time, careless and handsome as a young god, he came into the indoroun, and reclining on cushions allowed her to serve him fruits or tea, while she, trembling with happiness beneath her veils, hardly dared utter a word.

At the end of two years, as was customary, her husband was told that she was now old enough to be his wife, and after the nuptial baths and an evening of feasting and music she was led at midnight to his apartments and left alone with him. But the prince, a young gallant of twenty-three years, was not at all interested in the timid child ten years younger than he. Accustomed to the blooming flowers of love, the courtesans and dancers of the court, he saw nothing beautiful in the bud that had not yet spread its petals. He accepted her with every courtesy, and continued his usual life of gaiety outside the walls of his house.

The young wife, left neglected, suffered such tor-

PERSIA

ments as demons are too tenderhearted to inflict. She loved him, while he, too careless for scorn, did not think of her at all. Too proud to plead with him, she endeavoured to hide her anguish, and to endure his love for others without a protest. But when, after days of loneliness, she saw him returning happy and beautiful as the sun, her passionate heart could no longer bear its suffering. She upbraided him with terrible words and cries, threatening, in her rage against life that so tormented her, to kill him and to kill herself. These storms of fury startled and annoyed the young prince, who found himself married to a whirlwind that upset his whole household.

At length he perceived a happy road by which he might escape such turmoil and again live in peace. Pretending to adore her, he remained for some weeks at her side, lavishing upon her all the tenderness of love, while he taught her the delights of the drug that destroys realities and fills the mind with fantastic and delicious dreams. Shown the way by a hand whose very shadow she loved, his young wife soon learned to give her days and her nights to opium, and the prince, satisfied that now she would no longer trouble him, returned to his courtesans.

The prince had not been deceived; his wife no longer made his homecomings unpleasant. Now, for ever convinced that the real world was a desert, and the hope of happiness a mirage luring humanity to greater torments, she gave herself entirely to the drug. Lying on her cushions with the pipe by her side, she was tranquil and calm, while her husband pursued his pleasures.

Thus four years passed, and the princess was a woman.

TEHERAN

One day her husband, returning from a long absence, passed through her apartment and was struck motionless by her beauty. She had bloomed like a flower. Her body was rounded and graceful, her lips red and voluptuous, her dark eyes pools of shadows. Opium had left on her features the poetic traces of dreams and visions unshared by others. The prince passionately took her in his arms and covered her face with kisses. She remained as indifferent to his embrace as a flower. Chilled by her coldness, he released her and left her apartments.

But from that moment he was unable to erase her image from his mind. He abandoned his friends, dismissed his dancers, and remained in his own house, trying by every art to win the love of this woman who had awakened his first real tenderness. He adored her, tenderly, passionately, hopefully and despairingly. He filled her rooms with flowers, he covered her with jewels, he sent her verses written by his own hand; at last he knelt at her feet and wept. But the proud princess remained indifferent.

The prince at last made a desperate attempt to awaken her old love. Hoping to melt her coldness by arousing her former jealousy, he announced to her that in accordance with Mussulman custom he was about to take other wives. She listened to him without saying a word. And the prince, convinced that a rival beneath her own roof would re-awaken all her old passion, did in fact marry a second young and beautiful girl.

But the Queen of the Crowns, while the musicians were playing at the marriage-feast in the house of the new bride, went before the Kadi and divorced herself

P E R S I A

from her husband in the Mussulman manner, simply by declaring that she was unhappy with him and wished to return to her parents. That evening, when the bride entered the house of the prince, the Queen of the Crowns met her on the threshold.

"I give you the keys of my house," she said courteously to the new-comer. "Hereafter it is yours, yours alone." And she went out through the gates and returned to the house of her mother. The prince, who still loved her, never saw her again.

"Their heart is in their pipes," she said one day, speaking of men, and this saying was repeated through all Teheran, accompanied by the laughter of the Khanoums.

It was she whom I saw standing in the bare room of the hospital, and it seemed to me in that first glance that her dark eyes and haughty lips expressed all the sorrow of the world and all the pride with which it is endured.

"What a bizarre house. No one here, not even a djinn," she said.

"What do you seek, Khanoum?" I asked, parting the blankets that fell about the operating-table.

She looked at me intently. "It is you whom they call Vadjih-el-Saltaneh?"

"It is I, Khanoum."

"The very dogs, at this hour, have a shaded corner. What mother gave you birth to such a life?" she said to me.

"My mother is far away, Khanoum, and believes me happy. I pray that she may die believing it."

"Peace be with her, and may her shadow cover you," she replied, touched. She sat beside me and said

TEHERAN

that she had heard in the baths the story of my husband's departure and my wound, and she had come to say to me, "You are a stranger in this city where I have my home and gardens. Come and share them with me."

The offer was made so simply that it was impossible to reply that I did not know her.

"You will have my subterranean rooms, where you may bathe in pools of fresh water," she added, to persuade me. The very words seemed like dew, in the heat which was consuming me. "Come, I will take you to the house of my mother, where I live."

"Are there men in your house?"

"I have four brothers; three of them have for a long time lived in the biroun. The sight of them will never offend you, Khanoum. The fourth is a child who still lives in the indoroun with the women."

I still hesitated, but divining the cause of my doubts, she said: "In inviting you to my house, I trample beneath my feet the prejudices of my Mussulman faith. I hope that you will do the same with the prejudices of your religion."

"Khanoum," I replied, "all of us, Christians and Mussulmans, are the children of the same God, and the prophets of all religions are—the prophets."

I said this in politeness, but while I was saying it I felt that there might not be, after all, anything really extraordinary in my being a guest in the house of a Mussulman. Then I remembered that all that comes to us is sent by the will of God, and thanking the Queen of the Crowns I prepared myself to be presented to her mother.

An old porter, his arms folded upon his breast, bowed

PERSIA

respectfully before us, and opened the iron doors. I found myself under the sombre arches which lead beneath the biroun to the secluded inner gardens and apartments of the indoroun of a sumptuous Persian house. The queen invited me to mount a few steps, and we emerged into the sunshine and scents of a large garden murmurous with fountains.

A man ! Eternal God ! Had she then lied to me ?

“Khanoum,” I stammered, faltering.

“Calm yourself, by Allah,” she said to me. “It is my little brother Nadir.”

The child of whom she had spoken was a slender young man of seventeen years, who lay stretched on a couch. His beauty impressed me deeply. His almond eyes, beneath sorrowful brows, shone like the mystic eyes of a dervish. A bluish pallor softened the ardent colour of his cheeks. He rose and saluted me respectfully.

The Queen of the Crowns and I passed beneath the colonnades that curved around three sides of the garden. The floor beneath our feet, the wall of the house, and the vaulted ceiling were a blaze of rich mosaics. On the threshold of one of the many-arched doorways the queen’s mother, Envar-ed-Doule, waited to receive me. She embraced me as though she were welcoming a daughter ; a kindliness great enough to cover all the world’s sorrows and frailties was expressed in her wrinkled face. Her first words were of her son Nadir. “Alas, he is consumed by a fever as terrible as the breath of the desert. For the first time in three weeks he has left his bed, and he has done so in order to welcome you to our house.”

“Khanoum, I am a messenger of happiness,” I

TEHERAN

said to comfort her. "Your son will soon be well."

"The goodness of the All-Merciful is great as His shadow upon us," she sighed. "May it be He Who speaks through your mouth."

Indeed, from that day Nadir no longer kept to his bed. His aspect was feverish, but he held himself bravely on his feet. He thought no longer of death, but dressed himself with care and joined us in our cool underground retreats. He recited the verses of the Koran, spoke to me of Mohammed, of the Temple of Mecca, of the Miraculous Black Stone of Kaaba, and I saw his desire to see me haloed with the light of the prophet.

His recovery was believed to be due to a magic force which destiny had sent him in my person. I was the idol of his mother, the fetish of all the family; every one called me "Asiz."¹

When, hesitating to accept so much care and love from this household, I spoke of returning to the hut in which my husband had left me, the queen's mother with tears begged me to stay. "The evil spirits will again take possession of Nadir. He feels himself overpowered, life has no taste on his lips, and everything wearies him. Calm comes to him only when he hears your steps."

Carrying thus the good genius of Nadir, how could I leave him to the cruelties of his evil one? The mother's zeal, which kept me always in the house, exasperated the Queen of the Crowns, who liked to distract herself by visits to her friends, but I was content in the spacious underground rooms in which we passed the days.

¹ Pet.

PERSIA

In the evening, when every one else was sleeping on little couches in the middle of the gardens, the queen and I mounted to the roof where our rugs were spread. The tops of trees encircled this vast bed, protecting us from indiscreet eyes. The velvet of a star-brocaded sky was our ceiling, the frogs in distant pools sang to us a rustic chant often interrupted by the calls of owls. It seemed to me then that all the earth was singing to the stars, and that the scented air was the breath of angels. Ah, nights of Persia, delicious and intoxicating as wine cooled in snow, shall I ever know you again?

At dawn, Nadir came to scatter on our cushions armfuls of roses, whose thorns awakened us at our slightest movement. Kneeling beside the couch he would kiss tenderly the ends of my hair, while I lifted my eyelids to give him the morning smile. Then the queen and I descended into the garden to plunge into a pool, and went back to our underground rooms where the servants brought us tea.

Sick, feeble and tormented, my moods altered every hour of the day. Sometimes I would laugh aloud, listening to stories told by the queen, in which her witty and ironical comments sparkled like jewels. Again, I would lose myself in silence, thinking of my master. Plunged in a black sadness I asked myself, "Where is he? Is he happy? Will he come back to me some day? How could he have a heart that would abandon me, who lived only for him?"

And with my face hidden in my hands I fell upon the cushions, refusing to eat or to drink, unable to reply to questions except with my tears.

"Donia de rouze ast, the universe is two days," the queen would say to me.

TEHERAN

She meant that no sorrow is great because death effaces everything.

To divert me, the queen resumed the informal fêtes which made the hours of darkness gay. Our friends came with their servants to pass the night by the edge of our pools. The moon was the yellow lantern that lighted the gardens. Under its beams the leaves of the poplars became black and silver, the flowers lost their colours, and the spray of the fountains was silver mist. In our light robes, bleached by the magic light of the colours of faded paintings, we lounged upon the grass. We told little stories, we plunged naked into the pools and played there, tossing handfuls of the sparkling water at each other like showers of light. Shaking out our long wet hair, we lay again on the grass. Some one sang, another played the thar. And at dawn, after having listened for a long time to the melancholy voices of the singers, we fell asleep.

But between the old moon and the new our gardens lost their light, and we suspended these nocturnal fêtes. In order to give me complete repose, the queen left me for a few days in solitude.

The heat of the ground was like that of ovens. Lying on mats, naked under a veil, I rested my forehead against a vase filled with grapes, where a few pieces of ice drowned in water made me dream of cold unreal lands. That heat! What lover could give one such languor, what embraces impose such submission? The kisses of the sun were more intoxicating than all the kisses gathered in all the alcoves. I thought of my grandmothers who devoted themselves to the adoration

P E R S I A

of Ahouramazde. They knew, also, that no lover gave more of ecstasy than the sun, none !

The voice of Tahia came to rouse me. "A messenger wishes to speak to you, Khanoum."

I wrapped myself from head to foot. The messenger entered, followed by several slaves carrying a sort of pagoda covered with flowers.

"My master (here followed a multitude of titles, ending with "Prince Sword-of-the-Empire") would like to present himself personally before Khanoum (and he described me by a dozen titles among which I recognized only Vadjih-el-Saltaneh). My master asks that she deign to receive him to-morrow. My master begs her humbly to accept these flowers, dust beneath her feet, which he has himself gathered in the gardens of his father (he named one of the late Shahs of Persia)."

I knew well that, by all Christian morality, I should refuse to receive a stranger. I knew that I should reply in words, postponing the visit to an indefinite time; thus masking my refusal before his servants. But——

I was weary in that garden alone. My mind was languorous with dreams, my blood was warmed by the caresses of the sun, and the masses of flowers made me dizzy with their perfume. What crime would I commit in receiving in a dignified manner so noble a prince, who sent such pretty flowers ? I was only afraid of the Christians. But they did not know where I lived, and seeing this palanquin of flowers entering beneath Mussulman portals they would be far from imagining that it was I who was thus being tempted toward the abysses of hell. They would be indifferent to the fall of a Mussulman woman, they whose virtue would make them cruelly punish, in the name of Christ, a Christian.

TEHERAN

Makhlas !

I had the courage to reply, "In the name of God, say to your master that I obey his commands."

But I confess, my heart was beating quickly. It was not at all my conjugal conscience that troubled me. No. Was I not dismissed, as free as a freed slave? But a severe voice was saying to me: "What! You, daughter of priests and of the patriarchs, you will to-morrow look into the eyes of a Mussulman, perhaps hear the voice of a Mussulman speaking of love?"

But another voice, much sweeter, without doubt that of Satan, beguiled me to the sacrilege. Trembling beneath my veils I saw the slaves set down the flowers and follow the messenger from the gardens.

"Quick, Tahia, give me one by one these beautiful flowers, that I may read the message he has sent!"

One blood-red flower dominated all the others. It was the rose of Assyria, the emblem of amorous incantations, a flower that blooms for seven years. It spoke to me of a heart filled with love. Then Tahia gave me a bouquet of wild flowers which formed in Arabic characters my name interlaced with his. I put it against my cheek, and lying in the heaps of scented petals I drifted into a vague dream.

My first movement on awaking was to press the bouquet to my lips, plunging my face into it to inhale all its perfume. A living thing moved beneath my lips. Horror! It was a monster that crept among the flowers, crawling with innumerable legs.

"Tahia! Tahia!" I screamed, nearly fainting, throwing the bouquet from me.

"May the universe fall upon our heads!" she cried, seeing the monster. She seized it with the tongs and

PERSIA

threw it into a brazier. "Permit me, Khanoum, to go at once to ask the wise man Seied-ed-Dine to explain this evil omen. Perhaps, by the power of the talismans, he may be able to guard us against the danger."

"Go, Tahia, go at once!"

She soon returned, riding into the garden on her mule, and without waiting even to dismount she said, "The Seied wishes more time to explain to us this fearful omen. He is Soleiman himself," she added. "He says that all the mysteries of the universe reflect themselves in his spirit as the sky reflects itself in our eyeballs."

Toward evening the messenger of Seied-ed-Dine arrived, bearing his reading of the omen. Destiny was forewarning me of the fatal end of the love which was soliciting mine. The person who sent those flowers would never realize his hopes of winning me. Hasar-payi, the thousand-legged creature (for so he is called, though he has but forty) was the symbol of a woman with a base soul and a perfidious heart. She would wipe from his heart the image of me. The monster, of a species that inhabit water, indicated that this woman lived beyond the seas. She would be a Frenchwoman.

I commanded Tahia to keep silence upon this subject before the servants of Prince Sword-of-the-Empire. For in spite of every decree of Fate I was resolved to receive him the following day.

The sun was dying on the tree-tops when Prince Sword-of-the-Empire arrived. He was a handsome man who had seen about thirty years; he was dashing, gentle, melancholy. I received him fully veiled, so that all he could see of me was a hint of curved brows,

TEHERAN

the lines of shoulders and arms and my hands, whose finger-tips were rosy with henna. Knowing that a well-bred woman in conversation with a gentleman must not say more than "yes" and "no," I did nothing but repeat these words for two hours.

Under the pretext of reciting poetic stanzas upon the flowers and the birds that surrounded me, he addressed to me delicate tendernesses that affected me like a drug. He departed, leaving me in a deep reverie. O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, why didst thou not appear before me then, with all thy temples and lighted torches, to shield me from the delicious temptation of my thoughts?

The following morning Tahia announced the visit of an old woman. She came in, soberly but richly dressed in dark silks. Sitting on the cushions and looking at me with bright eyes buried in wrinkles, she talked for an hour upon different subjects. At last she asked me if I were willing to marry a Mussulman, rich and of high family, who would impose upon me merely the outward forms of Islam.

I did not ask her of what Mussulman she spoke. The idea of being torn to pieces by the Christians on my marriage day turned my heart to ice.

"Never, Khanoum, never! May God paralyse my tongue! How could I renounce even the forms of the religion of my fathers? For the love of the greatest Padishah, I would not condemn myself in the other world to the eternal clutches of Satan."

She saluted me respectfully and departed, downcast.

In spite of this reply, I received a letter from him. Knowing that some day I must go to Europe to be entirely cured of my wound, he said that he was

PERSIA

departing to await me in those lands where "The prophets do not hinder mortals from loving each other." (Thus he spoke to me of the Occident, which does not know even the meaning of the word "love"!) In fact, he soon left Persia to go to Paris.

This adventure was something with which to amuse the queen when she returned. Like all the women of the indorouns, she loved the intrigues of love, and she was in despair to see this romance so quickly ended.

"Why did he mix the wretched prophets with his love?" she said, shrugging her shoulders. "Our souls are theirs; our hearts are our own."

I listened in silence. Such words troubled my Christian faith, in which love, the soul, the heart, the body—all are lost in the one word "God," which paralysed all my human emotions.

"I would have made my house a nest for your love," she continued, lamenting. "I would have hidden you so well from the indiscreet that Allah himself would not have been able to discover you. Only my eyes would have contemplated you. Oh, of what beauty you have deprived my eyes!"

And she began to tell me the story of the birth of Prince Sword-of-the-Empire. It was not known who was his father or his mother. Without doubt he was the son of one of the sixty princesses of the indoroun of Padi-Shah. In any case, the Book of Gold in which the grand eunuch registers the loves of the Shah and the names of the women honoured by his visits attributed him to one who was called his mother.

"But then, is she not his mother?"

"No, she is sterile, the whole city knows it. Her situation in the palace was delicate. She was obliged

TEHERAN

to have a son at all costs. She feigned to be pregnant during the months. At the end of that time, according to custom, all the princesses were gathered about her bed to witness the birth of the child, when an old midwife entered, carrying two baskets. She offered to the princesses one of the baskets, asking each to choose an herb with which to perfume the bath of the new-born. The first who put in her fingers shrieked ; two snakes had seized her hand. She shook them off upon the floor and fled, followed by all the others, screaming.

“The old woman then brought from the other basket the child, stupefied with opium, and gave it to the princess in bed. When she had killed the snakes she called back the princesses, and nothing remained for them but to congratulate the mother. The grand eunuch had every interest in certifying to Padi-Shah the royal origin of the child. Prostrating himself on his stomach before the throne, he announced the joyful news and wished the Shah as many offspring as there are stars, and he received the gift of a garment from the royal wardrobe.”

This was, according to rumour, the origin of Sword-of-the-Empire.

I remained a long time lying upon my cushions, reflecting upon the blind mazes of this life, in which there are so many paths all leading to unknown ends. And, I confess it, I was melancholy when I remembered the prophecy of Seied-ed-Dine and reflected that perhaps already, in the unimaginably beautiful gardens of an indoroun in Paris, the prince was sitting with the woman who had wiped his image from my heart.

It happened, many years later, that we did meet in

P E R S I A

Paris. At the time when I received him in the gardens of the queen, he had a concubine who had blessed him with a son. He took this woman and their child with him to Paris, in order to give his son, Emerald, a European education. But when he reached Paris, before he had even left the station, a Frenchwoman approached him and said that for three days she had had nothing to eat ; dying of hunger, she begged him to help her.

As a good Mussulman, he could not refuse charity to the poor, his brothers. He told his concubine what the woman had said, and both were astonished to learn that such misfortune could befall anyone in this most splendid city of the world. The Persian woman, deeply affected, wept and clasped the woman in her arms, saying that Allah was good to allow them to begin their life in a foreign land by an act of charity. The stranger was at once invited to share their dinner. Afterwards they would themselves have taken her to her own door, but to their amazement they learned that she had no home. Therefore they kept her in their hotel.

The next morning she offered herself to them as a governess for their son, and in three days she had replaced the concubine, who was sent back to Persia. The Frenchwoman even tried to persuade the prince to give her conjugal honours, but here she found an unexpected resistance. However, without waiting for such formalities, she ordered the concierge to speak of her as Princess Sword-of-the-Empire.

I called upon them one day and found them in a garret, where she was teaching him French economy, finding his way of living too wasteful for his little means. The Princess Sword-of-the-Empire was washing dishes,

TEHERAN

the little Prince Emerald was sweeping the floor, and the Prince himself was rocking a cradle in which were twins. I tried to conceal the pain I felt at finding this prince of Persian legend in a setting so little legendary. He found it necessary to excuse himself.

"Yes, Khanoum," he said to me, "life is a black abyss. By threatening to commit suicide, she has destroyed me. You know the heart of a Persian; I am its victim."

And even I, alas! had not saved myself from the cruel fate of the dreamers of Asia lost in the harshness of the Occident. If I escape it for a few rare instants, it is my cymbals and my tambourine that evoke for me again the gardens and the dreams of my East.

Could the wise man Seied-ed-Dine have foretold to me, while I lay on the queen's scented cushions, the ending of my own romance! But the knowledge would have been only a serpent among the flowers, for no one can alter the mysterious writings of Destiny.

We were invited, the queen and I, to spend an evening at the home of Khanoum Zehir.

"Bahman-Mirza, the brother of Zehir," the queen told me, "has been the confidant of Prince Sword-of-the-Empire. Having had his ears filled with the sound of your praises, he himself feels amorous toward you, and aspires only to see you, though it be through the windows of the indoroun. Allow me to beautify you, and we shall be amused." This pleasantry seemed to me an interesting change from the monotony in which we lived.

"Come, I will make you as beautiful as the morning star," said the queen, commanding the servants to

PERSIA

bring pastes, paints and perfumes. I was docile. A white unguent covered my paleness, my cheeks were transformed into two vermilion apples, a layer of surma united into one black arc my two eyebrows. On my forehead a few painted stars made me resemble a starlit night; golden powder on my hair imitated the sun.

"Now you are dazzling," said the queen, holding a mirror before me.

"God All Powerful!" I cried. "What horror!"

A vicious and powerful face looked at me from the glass. It was like the Persian images of Zeleikha in anger complaining of Joseph to Pharaoh. I was overcome; the very sight of it terrified me. But there was nothing to do; the paint was of the best, and would defy water and oil for weeks. I must present myself under this mask. The most striking of all were my eyes; they were those of an enraged tigress.

"What is, must be," I said, shrugging. "Let us go thus to charm your Bahman!" At least, no one could think that I was committing the sin of showing my face to a Mussulman.

At the house of Zehir we found in a bouquet all the young women painted thus, in the traditional fashion for grand fêtes. I did not see Bahman, but without doubt his eyes followed each of my gestures from behind curtains or through the glass dome of the halls. And we could only suppose that he had not been disappointed, for our idle life was for a long time enlivened by his letters.

An old seller of oranges brought them, and to divert all suspicion she often changed her occupation, bringing one day rare embroideries, another day gold laces,

TEHERAN

in which we always found, carefully hidden, his messages.

"To love is to be intoxicated by the wine of eternity," he would write, quoting the Persian poets. "To give oneself to love is to find salvation, to know oneself and to die. But thou wilt say, to know me is to know immortality."

Little by little these letters, delicately passionate, became a need to me. Each morning I awaited with impatience the arrival of the old woman who brought them. Fearing to lose his respect by replying to them, I answered only by symbolic signs, by a flower or a bird in an enamelled cage. But what is required to nourish a passion ?

"Oh, that I might lie upon your path," said another quatrain. "That you might walk upon my eyeballs ! But I fear lest my lashes should wound your feet."

Growing more and more impatient, he sent me one day the verses of Hafiz, "Who was the happy one who gathered the flowers and fruits of thy garden ?"

Timid and fearful, I did not dare to see him.

"I consume myself," his feverish writing told me one day. "Too late thou wilt lean toward me, and like Cyprus dying, I will say to thee, 'Leave me ; already the circle blurs before my eyes ; fire, earth and water are one.'"

Zehir came one day to tell me that her brother was gravely ill. She did not dare to say more. After she had gone, the queen handed me a little portrait. "It is he," she said.

On that circle of ivory framed in jewels I saw him for the first time. His eyes begged me for caresses. No, I had not the courage to accept the love of a Mussulman.



P E R S I A

The queen alone knew my weakness when at night I tried to smother my sighs, and when in the mornings, tottering, I clung to the trees, my hands feverish and my throat choked with sobs. However, when she urged me to accept the love of Bahman I replied obstinately, "Never! Never! O my fathers! O Heaven!"

On the verge of death, he was taken to the mountains. I sent him the gift which should keep me for ever in his memory—a young eunuch.

What would I not give to-day, to be offered such a beautiful love! But beneath the noonday sun who can recover the rosy morning?

Yet I confess that these temptations which my Christian conscience resisted made a part of the charm of our indoroun life. The other half of that charm was in the complete liberty with which we played behind those walls apparently so imprisoning. After the grave atmosphere of the house of my father-in-law Assatour-Khan, the house of Envar-ed-Doule, the queen's mother, was a paradise of freedom and gaiety. Among the cushions, the flowers and the perfumes, the capricious Persian girls seemed spoiled children. For us Christians such joys were tasted only on days of betrothals or weddings. I remembered how I had offended all the elderly women of my husband's family by cutting a rose to bloom on my gown. It was so beautiful on the black velvet heavily embroidered with gold! But beneath the austere glances of the three ancient ladies I had felt that I wore on my breast all the vice of the world. Tearing it off, confused, I had thrown it into the pond where, drowning among the water-lilies, it

TEHERAN

had a less sinful look than among the roses of gold on my robe.

Beneath the same Persian sky, in the same walled gardens, among the Christians every one languished, every one sighed ; among the Persians every one laughed and sang. The brooks were more sparkling, the foot-paths whiter, the shadows bluer, the groves more perfumed. Men did not walk here with the stern majesty of King Saul and King Nebuchadnezzar. Here were no grandmothers who returned from Mass after having eaten the body of Christ, to freeze with their cold glances the careless mirth of the young.

All-merciful Father, what beautiful impulses, what beautiful loves are murdered in those Christian gardens ! The imprint of austerity must remain upon us even in our alcoves, even in the arms of our husbands. Loved and loving, we should commit a sin in expressing with gestures or words our tenderness. And this modesty, the unpitying reserve of patriarchal etiquette, froze in a few weeks of marriage all our springtime dreams. Oh, the cruel etiquette, to which all must submit, even the woman who is bearing a child ! Surrounded, according to our custom, by the eldest of the elders, she must become a mother without one sigh or one groan. It is thus that the weak and ardent Armenian women are disciplined, in order to make of them the martyr-mothers who, by the order of Turkish officers, will throw themselves into the Euphrates after seeing the murder of their husbands and the mangling of their children. Instead of blaspheming their God, turned thus into a bloody idol for them, they will die crossing themselves, denying neither the Cross nor their Saviour. They try to be strong enough even to smile at death

PERSIA

and to be happy thus to redeem the sins of the world.

Dear mothers of Armenia, it would be better for you if you had never known our Eastern Christ. More practical than we, the Occident has known how to express His sublime messages to men in such a way that they are heard with impunity. Let us regret that at the time of the grandeur of the infallible Popes, our fathers did not consent to submit to the power of Rome. Armed against the sublime words of Christ by the Holy Inquisition, by the *auto-da-fé*, by the indulgence and other safeguards, we Armenians would not have been reduced in a few centuries of fanatic Christianity from thirty millions of prosperous people to three millions of miserable survivors.

I ask myself why the Europeans, in order to conquer Asia, use powder and cannon, when by easily exploiting Oriental fanaticism a handful of Occidental Christians could make, without spilling one drop of blood, more conquests than their thousand merciless armies by land and sea.

Among the Persians I breathed at last with all my lungs. It seemed to me often that I had come from a dark, cold palace into a peaceful and charming garden warmed by the sun. There was no etiquette to observe, no men among the women. We were free, to go about in light garments, to bathe in the ponds, to gather flowers, to play the *thar*, sing, laugh, go to town or to the summer gardens—always, of course, veiled in the street and accompanied by old nurses. Persian women were absolute queens in their homes, and if it happened by chance that we met the men beneath the arches of

TEHERAN

the common entrance, it was for them to make way in order not to hinder us.

I really do not understand the cause of the error, common among Europeans, of believing that the Asiatic woman is a slave. To be the slave of tradition and of love is another thing; what is more beautiful than fiercely to cast aside one's will in order to submit to a beloved being? Did not Mary Magdalen gladly make herself the slave of Christ? And has there been in the world a more queen-like woman than that great courtesan of Magdala? As for the position of the Oriental woman before the law, one can only regret that that of the Occidental woman is so inferior. I advise feminists to borrow a few precepts of Mohammed concerning the rights of women. Protected by these precepts, the condition of the European woman, slave to her husband and to his laws, would be much improved.

I have said that we were absolute queens in our gardens. The men could not enter them save when Envar-ed-Doule invited them; we retired then into our underground rooms. If the guests interested us we mounted by ladders to the skylights, and there we criticized, mockingly or admiringly, their appearance, conversation and manners.

The house of Envar-ed-Doule, like all great houses of the Orient, was filled with poor old men and women, relatives or strangers picked up by charity from the bazaars. The Orientals, having no courts nor laws which impose upon society by force a sentiment of humanity toward the weak and the abandoned, are generous by nature and by tradition. Thus one never finds in our country women left starving by their husbands and young girls thrown upon the streets by base

PERSIA

lovers, as in the Occident. The people immediately bring help to such unfortunates, and their offenders, morally stoned by Asiatic society, lead the existence of outcasts without any hope and die in misery and contempt.

The women thus taken into a household never abuse the generosity of those who befriend them, because the conscience which directs everything in the Orient is infinitely superior to the respect for law which controls the Occident, especially since this respect must be for laws that are very indulgent to the unscrupulous. I have often admired, quite sincerely, the solidarity with which men of the Occident unite to defend one of their number against a woman whom he has wronged. This kind of comradeship is still unknown in our savage countries ; like all primitive peoples, we have a different sense of justice.

The old women sheltered beneath the roof of Envar-ed-Doule, far from oppressing our youth as do the Christian elders, made way for us like old leaves before the new. They squatted comfortably on wooden benches, to protect themselves from little snakes, and warmed themselves beneath the sun through long idle hours. When they wished distraction they came down to us, and in the shade of our vaults, smoking the odorous kalia, they would revive for us their picturesque pasts, sharing with us all the wisdom they had acquired in a long life.

When the loves of a horrible old woman, paralysed, bent, half-blind, nearly deaf, seemed to us too beautiful to be believed, she brought out to us the proofs. There were old letters, ardent and romantic, in which the old woman was addressed as a rose, as a doe, as a singing

TEHERAN

bird. She herself, chuckling in her withered throat, was the first to mock the changes which time has in reserve for us all. Leaning over the yellowed pages, we laughed at the ardour of the lover who had compared her to the moon, and sighed when she told us that she had seen his whitened bones which the jackals had dug from beneath a slab in the cemetery. But soon, distracted by other letters and other hyperboles, we forgot hideous death which watched us, and laughed gaily.

"Some day, my beautiful Khanoums," she said indulgently, "your grandchildren will mock you also when some one tells them that your eyes were like comets and your hair the shadows of night."

Indeed, nothing was impossible, if it were true that this hideous ruin had in other days maddened her masters, reigned in their harems, and left them weeping when, seized by a passion for a wandering dervish, she had abandoned everything to follow him and to tempt the human heart of the divine fakir.

"And did you really seduce him ?" asked the queen.

"Such was the will of Allah," piously replied the old woman. "In His wisdom, He has created seduction so that even divine fakirs must humble themselves before its power."

"And did you hold him for a long time ?"

"Alas, he was a wanderer ! How could I nail him to one spot for more than a day ? I remember that day in the desert ; the sun was torrid, the sands were golden. We were happy, oh, so happy ! But the freshness of the night awakened him from the dream, and terrified he fled toward the Arabian Sea, to wipe out his sin by the penitence of the great Imams."

"It is to avenge that unhappy man that Allah has

PERSIA

punished you by bending your back double," said the queen severely. She was grieved by the downfall of the saintly fakir.

"By penitence he will acquire in the celestial gardens a better place than he would have won before his fall," replied the old woman with sincere conviction. "As for my hump, the Merciful One has punished me for having once stolen the grace of his winged houris. Too many ardent arms embraced me in those days when I, intoxicated with the hours Allah had given me in which to be happy, displayed my body in lascivious dances."

"Go, vile Djende!" said the queen with repugnance.

"Praise to the Prophet Ali and to Saint Hossein, that shameful name is no longer mine," answered the old woman. "Barefooted, I made pilgrimage to Mecca and to Medine. Prostrated, crawling like a reptile, I dragged my unworthy body toward the sacred places. These eyes have been lifted to the black hyacinths of holy Kaaba. Praise to the celestial Fatima! for a long time I have been Hadji-Khanoum, and the gates of Paradise will open to me more easily than to you. Allah is great, and His mercy is infinite." And, bent double, supporting herself on her short crutches, this old sinner went away like a four-legged animal, exalted in our eyes by her limitless faith in the Divine mercy.

This Hadji-Khanoum did nothing in the house of Envar-ed-Doule. But her companions were not useless. From them one learned the recipes of ancient medicines, through them were completed the legends of which part had been forgotten, from their lips one learned by heart the songs of the old wandering singers, the songs of marriage and the funeral lamentations.

TEHERAN

It was they who taught the weavers the antique arabesques. They were also charged with finding concubines for the sons of Envar-ed-Doule, and with overseeing the innumerable children of the young servants in the farmyard where they lived among the hens and chicks. It was a joy to me to see them, those little naked children struggling with each other to suckle at the breasts of a soft-eyed doe which, with the impassiveness of a veritable mother, walked among them ready to nourish them at no matter what hour.

Wise mistress of a large house, Envar-ed-Doule gave to every one full liberty, and gratitude for her confidence established a happy order everywhere. The young listened without any rebellion to the advice of their elders. Only in complicated situations was the mistress of the house consulted. Then, after listening to every one concerned and taking counsel with the old women, Envar-ed-Doule solemnly reprimanded whoever had troubled the harmony of the common life.

There was only one person who destroyed our tranquillity and sowed anguish in the heart of the queen's mother. This was the little Suhun, former servant of the queen, now become the concubine of Prince Zelil, the second son of Envar-ed-Doule.

This little servant, who had for beauty only her large eyes, ardent and proud, had bewitched Zelil with a glance when one day he found her washing the queen's feet with her small henna-stained hands.

Allured by the beautiful eyes of the little maid, Zelil tried vainly to unveil her. For only an instant the long red veil which covered her from eyes to ankle fluttered apart, and Zelil was blinded by the immaculate

P E R S I A

whiteness of a young throat which showed through a light tunic. He tried to embrace her, but she evaded him, with a tinkling of silver bracelets.

"For whom do you keep this flowery garden?" Zelil said to her.

"For my master, for my beloved," she replied.

"And who is your master?" he demanded, trembling with jealousy.

"Only he who will take me, never again to abandon me."

"I am he, then!" cried Zelil.

He went at once to his sister the queen, and said, "Sister, go tell our venerable mother that I am twenty years old, that her house has need of posterity, and that, submitting to the will of Allah and my destiny, I take as my concubine your servant Suhun."

"May Heaven vomit flames upon my head!" cried the terrified queen. "May my soul become a torch in the black palace of Azerahil, if she is not a leper, my brother. What delights could you know in such arms?"

"Suhun shall be mine!" replied Zelil obstinately, seeing only that his sister wished to keep her servant from him.

In vain the whole family set themselves against Suhun and this concubinage. Zelil refused to listen, demanding Suhun. At last, seeing that he would neither eat nor drink, and that he was wasting with a fever which nothing else would cure, Envar-ed-Doule commanded that the little Suhun should be led from the queen's apartments to those of Zelil.

Just at midnight Suhun was placed in his impatient arms. According to the modesty of Persian marriages,

TEHERAN

the bride does not unveil herself. Respecting the little Suhun's bashfulness, and intoxicated by the touch of those little arms covered with bracelets that clasped his neck, Zelil did not uncover her face. Only at dawn did he unveil his beloved.

Horror ! A face hideously ravaged by deep healed scars tried to smile at him, but this smile seemed to him the grimace of a sorceress. Horrible cries awakened the household. They were the cries of Zelil, who fled to his mother.

From that night, Suhun was banished from his presence. But Allah had blessed her, and she was the mother of Zelil's male child. According to custom, her maternity gave Suhun a high place in the household. The child was loved and petted as the first grandchild of the family. Son of a servant, he nevertheless bore the name of his father, and inherited his wealth. The Mussulmans never despise, in any circumstances, the fruit of love, and are deeply horrified to learn that in the Occident the Christian peoples treat with cruelty those innocent children who are born of parents who have not placed on a piece of paper, in church or court, the proper number of signatures.

But Suhun began to command the household like a veritable little tyrant, forcing all desires to yield before hers. Nor was it only ambition that tormented her wilful nature. She loved Zelil with all her soul, and banished from his apartments she watched day and night at their door to prevent another pretty servant from taking a place by his side. From her misery and her jealousy came all the troubles that afflicted the peaceful house of Envar-ed-Doule. The fury of the little Suhun in the quarrels which broke forth around

P E R S I A

her shocked us all. Enraged, she knew how to wound not only all the seraglio, but even the venerable Envar-ed-Doule herself.

The other women had only one means of subduing her. It was to remind her that she was a leper. Then abruptly Suhun would become silent. Shrinking like a dog cruelly beaten, she would slip into a corner of the garden, and soon her shrieks and her prayers pierced our hearts. The evening fell, the moon rose, and still one heard her cries and her petitions to Allah, until madness took hold of her. Then she beat herself against the tree, tearing her hair and shrieking. Finally she fell on the grass and lay still, clutching her head between her hands.

Pitifully, I would go toward her. Veiled thus, her young and graceful body was beautiful. "Suhun, Suhun," I said, to rouse her from her stupor. She lay still. "Suhun," I said tenderly, kneeling beside her to put my hand on her poor head. Abruptly she rose, and prostrating herself before me laid her head upon my knees, trembling without weeping, because she found her sorrows understood.

Or sometimes, although he abhorred her, Zelil himself went to find her in these hours of hopeless revolt against Destiny, and standing at a distance with his arms folded he commanded her in a dry and authoritative tone to go to her child. When, seeing even in these words a little remembrance of their love, Suhun rose and passed before him, humble, with her head bowed, he said, "Tempt not the patience of Allah! Other women walk on bare feet to Mecca and to Medine to implore the holy Imams to bless them with posterity. I have given you a child. What more must you have?"

TEHERAN

Leaning against a tree she began again to weep, and Zelil angrily left her.

To distract ourselves from this tragedy, we were glad to listen to the gossip of a young seller of brocades. He rode into the garden solemnly seated upon a donkey with henna-dyed hoofs, which walked to the tinkling of innumerable silver ornaments. The donkey shared the dressed-up air of his master, who smiled down upon us as though he were a bringer of precious gifts from the days of Shah-Abbas. While, according to his custom, he washed his hands at the edge of one of our pools, his servant spread out a carpet and placed upon it the packages of goods, wrapped in silks.

Talking of the good weather, of our health, and of the rareness of beautiful things, the merchant took his place upon the carpet. After drinking a cup of tea offered by our servant and invoking many times the names of Allah, Hossein, Ali and all the Imams, he began slowly to display his merchandise. We learned that Azerbaijan had the year before been ravaged by an epidemic, that the roads of Mazandaran were overrun by the ferocious Baktiaris tribes, that for the next year we would have no more Afghan silks, that the shawls made at Bokhara since the invasion of the Muscovites were not as valuable as his, which dated from the time of the independent Emirs. He showed us also a few rare skins from Daghestan, and some precious merchandise from over-seas. By chance, he pulled from his pocket a magnificent amber necklace, which delighted the whole indoroun. With the greatest mystery he confided to us that it was a necklace which the Tartar princess of Kurdamir had given him in exchange for a

P E R S I A

magic veil which the beautiful Tartarian used to disguise herself from her old husband in order to meet her lover.

Finally, with a mysterious air, he reached toward the last package, and, rising to his feet, dazzled us with his mauve, blue, red and yellow brocades. The golden designs lost themselves amid arabesques of all colours, and the harmonious richness of that iridescence enchanted us like an old garden under the setting sun.

"Yesterday Khanoum Rogbet-es-Saltaneh bought a brocade like this for the marriage of her daughter, Dorreth-el-Molk," he said in an indifferent tone.

"Ya Allah!" cried Envar-ed-Doule. "She is married at last, that little obstinate! I believed her lost to the world, like all those who go to get learning in the Christian convents of Teheran."

"Why?" I asked, surprised.

"Following the example of the Christian nuns, who dedicate their virginity to the Prophet Messiah, that little Dorreth wished to dedicate hers to our Holy Prophet. As if in truth the Holy Prophet needed this virginity, not having enough with the winged houri and the silver-footed peri!"

As a Christian, I felt that I must protest against these light remarks upon the perpetual chastity of our convents.

"Khanoum," I said very respectfully, "may the celestial Imams tear out my tongue, and Saint Fatima change into flames all my veils, if I offend by reflections unworthy of the sublime verses of the Alcoran. Let us admit that our Christ has no need of the virginity of our nuns, nor even that of our monks. But is it just that according to the Alcoran—eternal rain of pearls and diamonds be upon it!—is it just that the entrance

TEHERAN

to your mosques should be reserved only to the men ? For, in order to pray there, woman must purify herself for three days and nights, while man by a simple ablution is rendered chaste. And as, thanks to Allah, all the good Mussulmans do not deprive themselves of the society of their faithful wives for so long as three days and three nights, one can hardly ever see in the sacred places the pious Mussulman women. Indeed, Khanoum, that seems to us as singular as our perpetual chastity seems to you."

"May the Prophet Ali preserve the verses of the Alcoran from our unworthy judgments," Envar-ed-Doule replied gravely, and to change the subject she bought a beautiful brocade.

The visit of the merchant being ended, we all helped to fold up the marvellous fabrics.

"To-morrow Padi-Shah gives an audience at the Dar-Bar palace," said the merchant, to show that he was not at all ignorant of affairs in high places. "And Shahzade, pardoned for intriguing against the Shah to obtain the throne, will be there."

"What has become of his old Franguian princess ?" asked Envar-ed-Doule.

"She had been persuaded to go from Persia into Franguistan."

The French princess of whom they spoke was an adventuress, a member of a great European family. Wearying of everything and dying of boredom in her own country, she undertook journeys in Persia, and at the head of a caravan she had visited the historic ruins in the farthest corners of the country. But it was the burlesque adventures on the highway and in the caravan-series, the pillaging, the fears of assassination, the

P E R S I A

menaces of the camel-drivers and the quarrels with the muleteers, which delighted her. And at last, O enchantment ! she discovered in an old abandoned garden a beautiful palace, Tchehel-Aine (Forty Mirrors) and amid the Forty Mirrors—a prince, a young prince ! Blond as the sun and pale as the moon, this young prince languished toward death, despairing of a fairy liberator who would take him from the exile in which he lived, far from the palace of his great fathers. He was, by law of birth, the heir to the throne of the Persian kings ; but the rebel vizirs, having changed the laws of his country, had exiled him in this palace at the borders of the kingdom of Iran. For months, within these dilapidated walls, the young prince had been consuming himself with boredom and wounded pride. That is why he recognized beneath the tailor-made costume of this Franguian princess the golden wings of his houri. He pardoned the somewhat ripe age of the princess and submitted docilely to the strokes of her magic wand.

The Frenchwoman, believing herself transported by this marvellous encounter into the realm of the Thousand and One Nights, lost all idea of reality, and clasping Shahzade in her arms she promised to make him king of the Persians, on the modest condition that he would place on her head the crown of the ancient queens of Iran. Love united the royal dream of Shahzade with the ambitious fancy of the princess, and they prepared a revolution in the Kingdom of Roses.

The adventuress equipped at her own cost a few hundred savage mountaineers, who gathered to themselves other bandits armed with daggers and clubs. This army, beneath the banners of the young Shahzade, set out toward Teheran. Appearing with the sound of

TEHERAN

ancient trumpets and warrior cymbals beneath the peaceful walls of the cities, Shahzade and his consort conquered them without shedding a drop of blood. Even Kasvinh surrendered, and the victorious army approached the yellow walls of Teheran. Finding the gates of this city closed, Shahzade and his princess camped beneath silken tents to await events.

The following day, when the sun had hardly risen above the horizon, a courageous herald appeared before the prince to announce that a price had been set on his head in the capital of Persia. Messenger of bad news, the herald was immediately nailed against the walls with pikes. Shahzade, discouraged, declared to the princess that he was ready to renounce the throne. But the valiant Frenchwoman called him a coward and announced that she would go alone into Teheran to force the authorities to surrender the city to her beautiful prince under threat of a siege. A European, she believed herself quite safe, being persuaded that all the powers of Europe would unite to punish miserable Persia for having dared to oppose her, a woman of the highest French families.

Alas ! The general of the Persian army was at that time an Armenian, Efrem. He was a grave, sober man, and did not in the least like such jokes. He commanded the princess to relieve Persia of her presence in forty-eight hours, exactly. If she were in the country after that time, she would be shot by his serbaz. The princess paled, cursed all the Armenians of the world, and without even saying adieu to her Prince of the Thousand and One Nights, she fled from Persia.

Peacefully sitting upon the carpet between the Queen of the Crowns and Envar-ed-Doule, could I suppose

P E R S I A

that one day in Paris I would be invited, as a Persian dancer, to an Oriental fête which this same princess was giving in a splendid hotel ? But heavens, what singular meetings have I not experienced in this world that once seemed to me so large !

As for Shahzade, the merchant informed us that after the departure of the Frenchwoman he had entered Teheran, submitting and pardoned, and that he was now living in the palace of the young Shah.

Curious to see him, I asked the queen to request her brothers to have me invited to the audience in the Dar-Bar palace.

The following day at an early hour I was in a corner of the royal gardens reserved for the guests.

Like all Persian houses, the palace of the Shah opened its façade to the garden, one of those open gardens at the same time sunny and melancholy, perfumed to giddiness by the roses and peopled by large peacocks with many-coloured tails ; one of those sleeping gardens where, soothed by the warm sun, one dreams of sweet caresses, of slow, slow joys, and of the limpid music of thars. Before our eyes rose the wall of the palace, a lacework of ebony, with its rose-windows jewels of a thousand colours, its arabesques of gold, and a panel opening into the interior. Through this opening we saw an arm-chair of gold, and a cushion embroidered with turquoises.

The vizir of Dar-Bar announced to us the approach of the Shah. The guests bowed before the name, and at the same instant a voice like that of the muezzin began to chant his annals. The most glorious names of antiquity, accompanied by hierarchic synonyms from

TEHERAN

the Book of Kings, resounded in our ears. The distant gigantic shadows of Cyrus, Cambyzes, Guistasp, covered with a cloak of glory the shoulders of this little King of Persia. All weak and pale as he appeared, the power of those splendid kings awakened in me the awe I had felt before the epic pages of Ferdousi.

Upon his astrakhan cap a lion of diamonds with a mane of white aigrettes lifted ferociously a curved sword to defend the golden sun that rose above the forehead of the young king. Beneath these arms of heathen Persia two large melancholy eyes seemed to wonder at all that passed below on the garden pavement. He seemed like one awakened from a heavy sleep to see, surprised, the specimens of new peoples come from all the corners of the earth to parade before him. Instead of envoys from the Mongol Tsars of Kazan, of Baktehi-Serail, instead of Tartarian Khans from Shamahka and Badkoube, kings of Hindustan and Samarkand, Emirs of Afghan, of Boukhara, princes of Armenia, of Medine and of Syria, here were ambassadors from France, England, Italy, Germany and America who passed before him. Proud and phlegmatic, these ambassadors hardly saluted him at all. They little resembled those of other times who prostrated themselves before the feet of the great kings of Persia as if before the gods.

The young Shah had at his right his younger brother, the heir; at his left stood Shahzade, to whom he addressed from time to time a gracious word. Standing behind this throne which he had disputed with the king, Shahzade, pale and bitter, tried to mask his bleeding pride with forced smiles. Below, on the pavement of the garden, the ambassadors filed past slowly, with

P E R S I A

the wearied manner of those compelled to play a useless comedy under the burning sun.

Here are the Chinese, little buddhas in wax, with the indefinable smile of idols ; the Japanese with eyes which see everything and reflect nothing in their pupils ; the Turks in German uniform with Asiatic head-dress. Sensuous and vain, they seem to wish to hide beneath the assurance of the newly-rich their surprise at finding themselves in civilized society. Here are their masters, the Germans, heavy and authoritative, mercilessly compressed in their gold-laced coats. Here are the English with their mysterious smile ; they pass, their eyes nearly closed. Beneath their tall, proud head-dress they are splendid. Here, the French, elegant, natural, always smiling, with large gestures. The Americans with their manner of sailors awkward on dry land. And finally the Russians in their rich, heavily ostentatious dress. They seemed to parade their power as invaders of this country where the mosques and the ancient palaces served them as stables and barracks. Half-Asiatic, half-European, tormented in their vast bleak steppes by one eternal nostalgia, they poured from Tibet to the Baltic, and we believed them destined some day to dominate the world.

I returned from this audience wearied by so many impressions. A cold bath in a pool of clear water refreshed me. During this bath I learned from the servants, who were also bathing to keep me company, that I had still another fête to see through the skylight of our underground apartments. That very evening the brothers of the queen, the Princes Kemal, Aboubekir and Zelil, were to receive in the garden of their

TEHERAN

biroun a company of young mutrubes.¹ It was the little Suhun who was charged with all the care of their reception.

Khanoum Envar-ed-Doule did not like her sons to be away from the house at night, but in order not to deprive them of pleasure she authorized them from time to time to amuse themselves in her house. They invited there for a day or two their friends among the courtesans of Teheran.

Envar-ed-Doule had serious reasons for such indulgence. The times were tumultuous. Since the Russian invasion there was no security anywhere, neither for goods nor life. The Russians practised faithfully their saying, *Ya Tsar, Yai Bog* (I am Tsar, therefore your God).

One day, tired of walking, I sat by the side of the road with my old Tahia. A peasant in rags was passing, carrying two fowls to sell in the city. Two Cossacks appeared upon the same road. One of them approached the peasant, and taking the fowls continued on his way without saying a word. The peasant meditated a moment, then turned and went sorrowfully back toward his village. Aroused by this mute scene, I stopped him.

"Why has he taken your fowls?" I asked him.

He regarded me with astonishment. "Why, to cook and eat them."

"But will he not pay for them?"

He looked at me with as much astonishment as though he had seen me fall from the sky. "Pay for them? He is a Russian!"

Everything was told in that. Not only by Russian

¹ Courtesan-dancers.

P E R S I A

minds, but also by Persian, it was believed that the Russians had been created by the good God to take everything without in any way paying for it. The Persians, least of all masters of their own country, had at this time to support all the claims of the savage tribes within it. In the general chaos each claimed his citizen's rights, that is to say, did not allow others to have theirs. From this resulted the cynical abuse of the words "liberty" and "fraternity." Each man got rid of his enemy by the blow of a dagger in the back, and men fraternized easily for pillage and assassinations upon the highways.

In these conditions, to venture out of the house at night, even for sentimental purposes, was truly dangerous. To avoid such risks, most of the Persians transformed their sober birouns into places of delight where they might forget the miseries of social calamities. The Persians, philosophers in everything, abhorred politics and much preferred the songs of nightingales to the conferences of deputies.

Long before evening the little garden of the biroun was swept and sprinkled. Upon the pavement thick rugs were spread. A few cushions were placed on them, and on trays were arranged dishes of fruit, sherbets and wines, stringed instruments, little cymbals, tambourines, kalias and opium pipes, all strewn with freshly-cut roses. The Arabian master of the stables helped little Suhun arrange everything; he was to take part in the entertainment, playing the flute and singing the songs of his own country in order to add the perfumes of Arabia to those of Persia.

The queen and I wished to watch the spectacle of this fête. The way was easy. One wall of our subter-

TEHERAN

raneean rooms overlooked the little garden of the biroun. The high windows of this wall had broad sills. Mounting to them by ladders, we installed ourselves comfortably there, behind iron gratings which concealed us. The windows were on a level with the garden ; we would be as close to those who came there as though we had ourselves gone to the fête in invisible cloaks. In another window Envar-ed-Doule and the young Nadir were ready to contemplate all that passed before their eyes. Less romantic than we, they were eating nuts and bonbons.

The mutrubes arrived, covered by long black veils. With slow, grave movements, their left hands threw back the veils from their faces, the right hands were laid upon their hearts. They greeted the men with great dignity. Standing, the men bowed respectfully.

“Salem-el-alecom !”

“Afhate cherif !”

Our little Suhun, veiled as always, received the guests with the grace of a princess. Speaking of the beautiful weather, of their precious health, she amiably invited them to recline upon the cushions and to remove their long veils, which she immediately handed to a servant to be folded. According to custom, without receiving any order, another servant brought a black ewer of fresh water and poured a thin stream over the hands of the guest into a bronze basin : another offered towels. Always standing, the young men awaited permission to take their places on their rugs.

“Ya Allah !” I said, surprised, in the ear of the queen. “One would say that your brothers were receiving in their home the Queen of Sheba, or Saint Fatima.”

PERSIA

“But what else?” she said, as surprised as I.
“Mutrubes are women.”

The servant was passing among the guests, offering cups of sorbet from her silver tray. The kalia was lighted, and drifts of scented smoke floated from painted lips to dissolve in the still air. Now and then an idle hand brushed a wisp of music from the strings of an instrument.

Of the five mutrubes, one was merely a child, and another about forty years old. According to our customs, this older one had already abandoned the life of a courtesan. Serious, and without any rouge, she appeared as grave as the young girl. The thoughts of both seemed far away. The lassitude of the older woman seemed to hold all the sleeping memories of her life; the dreaming eyes of the child seemed to listen to the wings of the mysterious future which was flying toward her. The other three dancers were young women sixteen or seventeen years old.

To honour the month of Mouhareem in which we were, the elder recited a verse of the Alcoran. Then she began to sing the most beautiful fragments of old poems and familiar legends. Melancholy and bereft of all illusions, this singer put into her song all the feeling which in times now past she had put into her loves. Sad memories, anguish and longing, tenderness and ardour, were dignified by a noble sorrow, like bright colours in an autumn garden. She sang of the crystal palace of Soleiman, ruler of the djinns, fairy halls built upon a lake. Here, at the threshold, stood the Queen of Sheba, called in Persia “Queen of the West.” She is pale as the morning star in her long robes that hide her golden feet from the eyes of the indiscreet. Mys-

TEHERAN

terious feet, that no one in all the world has seen ! But the djinns, who bow to the will of Soleiman, approach, invisible. They pull away the carpet from beneath her sandals. Left on the floor of crystal, she believes herself sinking into the lake ; terrified, she lifts the edge of her robes. And Soleiman is dazzled by the beauty of two little golden feet, covered with a light down. It is this down, soft as the bloom on a peach, that enchants the great king. And the first favour that he asks that evening of his little queen is to be allowed to press against his eyeballs those little feet, seen for an instant on the crystal slabs above the lake water.

The singer stopped, moistened her lips with sorbet, lifted a rose to her nostrils, and after a few straying notes from the strings of the thar she began again to sing.

Attentive and thoughtful, her hearers lay upon the rugs, transported with her to the lands of faery.

Now she sang of the tragic love of Medjnoun and Leily.

Leily was not beautiful, but Medjnoun loved her. And when Leily's father separated them for ever by giving his daughter to an Arabian prince, Medjnoun went away into the deserts to break the hearts of the wild beasts by his sorrow and to cause the stones themselves to weep.

" Leily, Leily," sang the sobbing voice. " Light of my life, bringer of death, Leily ! Leily, Leily, O my love ! "

In each other's arms the queen and I wept as if it were our names that Medjnoun was crying alone in the silence of the desert. The mutrubes covered their faces, and the queen's brother trembled with grief.

P E R S I A

Hardly had we quieted our sobs and dried our eyes, when we heard the tragedy of Ferhad and of Shirine.

Shirine, Queen of Armenia in heathen times, swayed before us, young, beautiful, loving and loved by Khosrow, Emperor of Persia. But for the welfare of his kingdom Khosrow must take as his wife another queen. Shirine, wounded to death by her love, left her palace and gardens, renounced her throne, and went into the desert to die alone among the cliffs of Bi-Soutoun. To comfort her last moments, Khosrow sent his sculptor, the giant Ferhad, to carve his emperor's image on the rocks of Bi-Soutoun. Shirine left her refuge in the cliffs and came to gaze upon the image of her beloved, and Ferhad, seeing all the sorrows of the world in her dark eyes, loved Shirine. Before the image of the emperor, Ferhad killed himself by a blow of his great hammer. Bending above the dying giant, Shirine felt her heart melting in the fire of his great love, and gave her lips to his kisses.

"Come, O my queen ! Come, O splendid death ! My light, my sun, my sea of love, Shirine, Shirine ! Eternity of rapture, O my Shirine !" And death united the souls of these great lovers.

The youngest of the mutrubes, crouched beside the singer, wept, and kissed the hands that rested on the strings of the thar.

"But I am changing the festival into a funeral !" the singer said, smiling upon the listeners who were broken by emotion like flowers by rain. "Rise, my daughter," she continued, addressing the child. "Dance for us your pretty dances ; we are here to love and laugh, not to mourn the sorrow of old loves."

The little one rose and arranged the folds of her dress.

TEHERAN

The scarlet silken sash was moulded about her slender hips ; a transparent white robe covered her childish body. With a sweeping gesture she took the cymbals, flung back her thick rich locks of hair, rose upon the tips of her little feet, and began her dance. It was the poem of the awakening of the lotus to the sunshine, sung by the little quiverings of her adolescent body. Her eyes closed, her lips parted in an innocent smile, she was as fresh as the lotus and as candid as the dawn.

At the end of the dance, Prince Kemal called her to him and kissed her upon the forehead. She smiled, and in order to be polite offered her forehead to Zelil and to Aboubekir. With the manner of affectionate brothers they kissed her, and offered her bonbons, which she gathered in her little red handkerchief, and then returned to her place beside the singer.

"Let us go to sleep, my daughter. The hour is late for us two," the singer said to her as kindly as a mother, and preceded by Suhun they went into the biroun, where servants were spreading their beds.

The venerable Envar-ed-Doule, saying, "Youth to the young," left her place in the window, taking with her the young Nadir, who begged her to let him see all of the fête. "Come, come, my son," she said to him tenderly. "At your age it is better to sleep. In two years you, too, will be with your brothers in the biroun. But now, let us go to sleep."

The queen and I rearranged our cushions, and remained in our window. We were both of the same age as the dancers, and nothing was forbidden to us.

The spirit of the garden changed with the departure of the older woman, whom the young mutrubes

P E R S I A

respected as a mother. She was their mistress in the difficult art of the courtesans of Asia. From her they learned the science of pleasing the eye, of dancing, being open-hearted, reciting beautiful poems, scattering through their conversation jewels of proverbs, and how to flatter shy wooers, to be proud with bold men, to be grave in the evening and to blossom into flowers of love in the dawn.

The young men asked permission to remove their sober black robes, and draped in long white tunics they stretched out on the cushions. The dancers emerged from their veils, leaving only silken tunics embroidered in gold, with long sleeves that half-opened to reveal the twinkling of their white arms.

Zelil took the thar and began to play : the mutrubes danced. The garden seemed to laugh with all its willow branches. Even the olive-trees, silver in the light of the moon, cast away their moody air, and the one great cypress that overlooked the smaller trees lost its severity.

The eyes of the princes fixed themselves upon the palpitating throats and slender arms of the dancers. Bending forward to the ground, the girls, like charming serpents, slid their bodies along the carpet, and to the rhythm of the slow music, laughing, almost reached the arms held out to them, retreating again when an eager touch would have broken the rhythm of the dance.

Of the three mutrubes one, an Armenian, dreamy and sad, incarnated so well the spirit of the legendary queen that in addressing her they said, "Khanoun Shirine." Another was mischievous and mirthful, and the third, Assorie, was a tall and beautiful Assyrian.

TEHERAN

Her strong shoulders, her gleaming arms and thighs, were those of the marble figures of antiquity. From the beginning, without any hesitation, she had chosen the handsome Arabian horseman, preferring him to any of his masters. Sitting silent and gazing into each other's eyes, they seemed to have forgotten the world.

It was only when Zelil, tired of playing, threw aside the thar, that the Arab stood up among the rose-bushes, and lifting his flute to his lips began to play the melodies of his Arabia. A country of magic and dreams rose before our eyes. The lovers ceased their ardent glances, raised themselves on their cushions, and leaning on their elbows abandoned themselves to the charm of the flute. This severe and haughty Arab was no longer their groom, but a proud king of the deserts, who was wearied to death among the little men and weaklings of a dying country. He evoked the crystal air of Arabia, the solitude of vast plains and the strength of great winds. He brought the desert into those narrow walls. The soft voluptuousness of the little Persian gardens sickened him, and his flute wept with regret and with rage. It cried that he would give a thousand languorous women for one hour of racing with the desert wind upon a fiery horse.

Humiliated by the grandeur and the vigour of this Arabian, the little Persian princes rose and tried to escape the burden of themselves by wandering up and down the paths of their garden. Zelil, returning, took up the thar to drive away the futile longings that saddened them. And again in the intoxication of the dance they forgot the world.

A poignant sadness ran through me. "So soon," I thought, "all the beauty and fire of life that fills these

P E R S I A

trembling bodies will be dust in forgotten tombs."

Kemal kissed the melancholy Shirine. She wept with happiness under his caresses. Smiling, Kemal dried her tears with rose-leaves.

Zelil no longer wakened the soul of the thar with his slender fingers. Weary, he slept, his head laid on the knees of Suhun. Happy in this unexpected tenderness, Suhun held his head between her hands like a sacred lotus. On the rugs the tired dancers slept. The white moon was melting into the light clouds of dawn.

Slowly the silvery olive trees resumed their dusty green; the dark roses became golden and crimson in the clear light; the cypress stood severe against the light sky. The birds awoke; the voice of the muezzin announced the sun. Princes and dancers awakened, turned their pale faces toward the sunrise, and whispered their prayers. A yellow ray of sunlight entered the garden, calling believers to fasting and the prayers of Mouhareem. Separating, the lovers went into the biroun to sleep until evening.

We descended from our window. "Queen," I said to her, affected by all that we had just seen from our hidden corner during that beautiful summer night, "We Christians, we call all that a mortal sin."

She shrugged her shoulders. "And we others, we call it, love."

We slept. But the beautiful reality seen through our windows reflected itself in my dreams. Other lovers, beneath my eyes, kissed and sighed and danced to the rhythm of the thars that wept the swift passing of all loves. I woke, I seized the hands of the queen who slept beside me.

"Oh no, no! Do not sleep! How can you sleep?"

TEHERAN

I, I want to live, to live with all my soul in a drunkenness of happiness ! ”

She smiled.

“ O my queen,” I said, stifling. “ The vaults of these rooms begin to oppress me as much as the heavy beams of our patriarchal houses. Let us go away ! Let us go far from this place, to the countries where all the women are free, free to live fully every hour of their lives ! ”

“ But where ? ” she asked.

I did not know. I knew only that something hidden in me that had been growing unnoticed had suddenly thrust leaves and blossom into the daylight. And its blossom was a desire to escape from all walls, to be free. Freedom ? What was it ? I did not know, but I desired it. The Persian society in which I lived was much freer from the bondage of prejudice than the Christian society from which I had come, but it was nevertheless the slavery which good society is, everywhere. Like all women in high social position, we were held in the mire of stupidities and absurdities into which “ propriety ” and “ a good education ” had sunk our feet ; we were incapable of being truly free spirits. Yet I remembered the unhappiness and disaster to which my brother had come, left by my father to develop as freely as the animals, according to the precepts of Rousseau. Liberty ? Perhaps humanity is incapable of it. Liberty is perhaps only a dream. But that day, in spite of their beauty, the sombre vaults of our luxurious rooms oppressed and stifled me.

To distract me, the queen took me that afternoon outside the city to the ruins of Rey, the ancient capital

PERSIA

of Persia. There, amid excavations like gashes in the dry earth, stood one wall. An emperor, surrounded by his twelve sons, his vizirs, his horsemen, his dancers and his musicians, was carved there in a glory mocked by the little lizards crawling on the proud writing that framed his grandeur, vanished now into nothingness.

A fakir with the face of a dying ascetic, disturbed in his meditations, came out like a bat from the heaps of rocks. Angered because our voices had troubled his dreams, he cursed us with the sharp sounds of his dervish horn.

"It is life I want," I cried. "Not the death of kingdoms. This wall terrifies me. It is more terrible than a thousand cemeteries."

"Very well," she replied, and turning to the driver of our carriage she said, "Go to Shah-Abdul-Azim."

"But do not be surprised," she said to me, "if the lack of servants and the appearance of our feet, too finely shod for those of grave khanoums, cause us to be taken for mutrubes."

Having seen so closely those charming courtesan dancers, I did not at all mind being thought one of them for an hour or two.

Shah-Abdul-Azim is a pretty village built around a mosque of the same name that stands above the tomb of Abdul-Azim, one of the most virtuous rulers of Persia. Gardens rose from the desert to spread their shade about this tomb, and time has canonized it and made it a place of pilgrimage.

Night had reached Shah-Abdul-Azim before we arrived, but it had not brought darkness. We were in the month of Mouhareem, the month in which night becomes day for the Mussulman. Illuminated by

TEHERAN

thousands of flaming torches, the village seemed to be on fire. Beneath the smoking lights, a little bazaar. Alleys crowded with asses decked in tinkling bells, and Arabian horses ornamented with blue beads. Poplars shivering against the walls, gutters murmuring with the voices of living water. Little fruit-shops right and left; on their thresholds old men with rust-coloured beards smoked their pipes. Little children played on the pavements, among the hoofs of asses and mules. In the crowds handsome men, grave and languorous, clad in sardaris of black silk and tall caps of astrakhan, followed with their velvety gaze the veiled women who passed with a tinkling of bracelets. Graciously the women allowed the wind to lift their fluttering veils, and their glances, at once timid and bold, stabbed manly hearts. All this colour and movement, this living tapestry woven of human lives, buzzed like a beehive with the sounds of voices, laughter, shuffling of sandals, cries of the camel- and mule-drivers, calls of the fruit and sorbet sellers. From time to time the high clear call of the muezzin came down from the skies to sanctify by prayer this happy care-free life.

At the entrance to the village we had descended from our carriage to mingle with the crowds. Now a sound like the groans of the damned fell on our ears. We were before the wall that surrounded the mosque. We could see only the dome, lighted by the smoking torches of the penitents, and hear the clanking of iron chains, sobs, moans, and the jerky rhythm of drums. In the black smoke and lurid lights the panic-stricken trees quivered, holding out their branches toward us. I was seized by a desire to enter, if only for a moment, that mysterious place.

P E R S I A

“Dear queen, let us go there—into that garden,” I said.

She was silent. The idea of introducing a Christian, a Giaour, into that sacred place wounded the Mussulman in her. I blushed, and said quickly, “Forgive me, in the name of Allah. It is because I have been treated in your house as one of the family that I ventured to ask to be allowed to salute the house of Mohammed.”

“May His light fall upon you, and His truth illumine your soul,” she replied. “Let us go in. Your heart is pure.” And lifting the heavy chains that hung across the entrance she led me into the garden forbidden to unbelievers.

In a circle of torches, the worshippers were dancing. Whipping their bare shoulders with iron chains, they followed in a circle the rhythmic leaps of their leader, who beat his chest with one hand and struck his head with a naked sword held in the other. Naked to the waist, glistening with blood and sweat, surrounded by the lamentations of black-robed women, they were shouting, “Shah Hossein! Vah Hossein! Ya Ali!” These sacred names rose toward the black space of the sky, followed by the monotonous thick heart-beat of the drums, the clashing of cymbals, and the shrieks of the women. I could not move. The dancing red lights of the torches upon shaved and bloody heads frightened me as would the flames of hell. These epileptics, insensible to pain or fatigue, whose staring eyes and jerking bodies expressed the rage and desperation of those who for an instant have seen Paradise, only to lose it for ever, seemed to me the fiends of Azerahil.

“Let us go, let us go!” the queen said to me.

TEHERAN

"These dances make me want to die beating my head against the walls. Let us bow before the tomb of Abdul-Azim, and go!" Her face was wet with tears.

"What! You—you wish to take me into the mosque?" I said, choking.

"Come, come," she answered feverishly. "You will see two magnificent tombs in wrought silver set with turquoises; you will see curtains of pearls as large as your eyes; you will see great lamps of Mesr gold made in Schiras; you will see the ancient prayer-rugs, and prostrated on your face you will kiss the floor of this mosque. Come, let us do it quickly, let us do it quickly, and go!"

She hastened, murmuring prayers. I followed her, trembling. I, a Christian, a Giaour, in the month of Mouharem, set my feet upon the sacred threshold of the mosque. Conscious of the sacrilege I was committing, I was like one drunk. In the feeble light of the lamps, through a haze, as if in delirium, I hardly saw the Arabian arches, the silver tombs, the dark corners hung with white curtains. The curtains were of black velvet, but so richly embroidered with pearls that they seemed white.

The queen prostrated herself; I, too, fell on my face. I could not think; my mind was lost in a fog.

"Woman, why are you wearing shoes, here!" I heard suddenly a brutal, enraged voice. "Giaour!" A rough hand seized my shoulder.

"It is the end," I felt. "This is my death." Mingled with the sensation of falling through endless black space was the feeling that my mind was a small clear mirror, in which I saw my body torn to bloody

PERSIA

fragments under the red light of torches. I felt my hands clutching the veils of the queen.

She turned quickly. "Let her alone!" she said. "She is my sister-in-law, a Kurd; she is not familiar with our laws. But may Allah strike me dead if she is a Giaour!"

"Giaour! A Giaour here!" said some one ferociously.

"Giaour! A Giaour!" repeated furious voices.

In an instant the dancers would hear that word and would throw themselves upon me. Already I felt their torches burying themselves in my body, my head splitting beneath their feet. I threw myself toward the doorway.

"She is my sister-in-law, a Kurd!" repeated the queen. "Allah rain fire upon me if I lie! She is a true believer!" And in vain she tried to restrain the frantic haste that was betraying me.

But in a moment we were out of the garden, caught in the crowds of the streets. I rushed onward, dragging the queen behind me. "Wait, wait," she said, laughing. "Where are you going?"

Her laughter told me that I was saved. I could not speak; it seemed to me that my veins were filled with weakness. Suddenly her hand seized mine. "Ah! we are followed. We are lost!" she said, terrified. Two men were following us.

We hurried on, the queen glancing over her shoulder at every step. "It is nothing," she whispered in my ear. "They are two gallants who take us for courtesans." She laughed. "Come, it is all over. Let us find our coachman."

We were not far from the corner where we had

TEHERAN

left him, with orders not to stir until we returned. But, bewildered, we saw neither carriage nor coachman. An old beggar approached us.

"Khanoums," he said, "your coachman has commanded me to offer you his respectful greetings. After drinking some sorbet and hearing the tales of some story-tellers, he found a company of noble Baktiaris who promised him a mountain of gold if he would take them to the city. To you his salute; to us, the poor, the charity of the rich." He held out his open hand.

The queen was furious. "May his body be food for Shaitan!" she exclaimed, placing a coin in the beggar's hand. "How, then, shall we reach the city, with neither carriage nor mules?"

The two gallants greeted us respectfully.

"Could we, by the graciousness of Destiny, be of service to the beautiful Khanoums?" said one of them. "Do such charming gazelles wish anything that humble devotion might offer them?"

"Allah spread over you his shadow!" said the queen. "Indeed, we would be so happy, Aghas, to find two mules and a servant to take us to our residence in the city."

"Your orders are written upon our eyeballs," they replied. "In half an hour you shall have our own mules."

"At the day of the resurrection may your eyes see only light," said the queen in sincere gratitude.

"What light is more to be desired than that of the moon, your face?" the younger answered. "Allah have pity upon us, and send us the alms of your smile."

"Allah hears the prayers of the faithful," replied the

P E R S I A

queen. "Implore His favour and He will perhaps grant your petitions."

There was in that a very grave promise. But the queen, too profoundly unhappy to value greatly anything, never counted the cost of her impulses. The young men smiled, happy at the prospect of meeting us again in the intimacy of our gardens.

"And may our ears be rejoiced by hearing the names of our doves?"

"Allah is my witness that before we leave Shah-Abdul-Azim you will know them," the queen promised.

"And perhaps even those of the gardens where happy ones are blinded by the radiance of those eyes?"

"You will know that also," said the queen.

"Is that as true as the Koran?"

"As true as the holy Alcoran," the queen said solemnly.

The two young men went away to find their servant and the mules.

"Queen, what have you promised them?" I said in confusion.

"Do not be troubled. I will tell them my name," she said.

"And if . . ."

"Allah is great and wise," she interrupted. "While we are waiting, let us smoke a kalia in the house of this sheik."

We were near a sheik's house, and as they are caravan-series for all passers-by, we could enter it without any formality. Summoned by the violent barking of the dogs, an old, bent figure appeared on the doorstep with a flaming pine torch. Her fantastic shadow danced on the low walls.

TEHERAN

"Salem-el-Alecom," she said to us with goodwill. "Enter in the name of Allah. The sheik is at the mosque; I am alone in the house."

We stooped to enter the bare old room. No furniture, a dingy carpet spread on the earth floor, a poor dinner arranged on a little cloth. One table encrusted with mother-of-pearl, and with an open Koran upon it, was lighted by a candle.

"Continue your pious task," said the queen, guessing that the wife of the sheik had been reciting the Koran.

"Allah is patient," she replied, removing the glasses that balanced on the tip of her nose. And curious to know who we were, she invited us to sit beside her on the ragged carpet. Without any order being given, an old servant brought and lighted the *kalian*. The queen took the long tube, put the mouthpiece to her lips, and began smoking with visible pleasure. I closed my eyelids and leaned against the wall, wearied by so many emotions. But the queen sought a little diversion.

"She is my sister-in-law," she said to the wife of the sheik.

"May Allah never deprive her of that good fortune," replied the old woman. "She appears to be of the type of the fragile women of Azerbaijan," she added.

"She comes from a still greater distance, *Khanoum*," answered the queen. "She is from *Kara-Dag*."

"Ya Allah! From the Caucasus? Is she Shiite or Sunnite?" the old woman pursued, wishing to know to which Mussulman sect I belonged.

"She is of the tribe of the *Kerahim*," the queen said mysteriously. I veiled my face quickly to hide a laugh.

PERSIA

“Kerahims ?” the wife of the sheik repeated, surprised. She had perhaps never even heard the name of this tribe. “Do they follow the true light that will one day lead them to Paradise ?”

“She herself is of the true faith,” said the queen. “How else could my brother have married her ?”

“And her tribe ? Does it still live in the darkness of ignorance ?”

“Alas !” said the queen in a tragic voice. “Her tribe still holds by two hands to the errors of the yahoudis.”

The old woman shook her head mournfully. “May the Prince of Heaven rest his merciful eyes upon that tribe,” she said kindly, and turning to me, “Why do you remain so sad and silent ?” she asked.

I had not time to speak before the queen said calmly, “She is mute, Khanoum. Allah protect the unhappy !”

The old woman regarded me tenderly, took the kalia and placed it before me. I bowed silently, and began to smoke.

“She is still very young,” said the old woman, “If your brother would send her on pilgrimage to Mecca and Kerbala, Allah would perhaps remove silence from her lips. Has she already served the prosperity of humanity and of your household ?”

“Alas !” sighed the queen. “The sins of her people rest heavily upon her ; she is sterile.”

“Allah remove from her His righteous anger !” cried the old woman, completely upset by so many calamities.

“Ah, Khanoum,” continued the queen as if inspired, “In His infinite wisdom——” But unfortunately for her fancies, the old porter at this moment announced

TEHERAN

respectfully that our brothers awaited our commands outside, with two mules and a mule-driver. We left the wife of the sheik upon the threshold, gazing after us into the darkness.

The queen was animated. These adventures had begun really to amuse her. She had already completely forgotten our emotions in the mosque. "Let us hasten to greet the lights of our souls!" she said merrily.

Those two young men approached us, their happy faces revealed by a small torch. With many compliments and poetic words they aided us to mount the mules. When we were comfortably seated they reminded the queen of her promise.

"I am the sister of the Princes Kemal, Zelil, and Aboubekir," she said gravely. The young men stood for an instant dumb, then bent double before those names, known to every one.

"She," continued the queen, indicating me, "is . . ." and she spoke my name. The young men saluted us with profound respect. "I have told you our names. Guard them in silence among the treasures of your souls," the queen commanded them, "and may peace be upon you."

Folding their hands on their breasts, they bowed deeply again. But to recompense them for their chivalrous aid, in taking the bridles of the mules we allowed our veils to float for an instant at the will of the wind, and their eager but respectful glances rested on our unveiled faces.

The queen held out to one her handkerchief. I gave mine to the other. They pressed them against their breasts, their lips, their eyes, to express silently their gratitude. And we rode away toward T'cheran.

PERSIA

That was all.

A comet rose from the Occident and climbed above our horizon. Pale at first, it became more and more terrifying and menaced the earth like a silver knife.

The dervishes predicted plagues upon the whole world, a great war, and the end of empires. A mystic dread filled our hearts. Each of us felt the presence of a mighty king in anger who showed us the sword of his executioner.

The day on which the comet would destroy us was announced. "At midday," said some. "At midnight," said others.

"Let us go to see the end of the world from our roof-tops," said the queen to me, while every one else was praying underground. "We shall never see anything more beautiful."

We mounted the ladders to the roofs.

At the instant of noon, between two winks of an eyelid, the sky covered itself with clouds that touched the earth; the black wind of the desert howled around us. Prostrate in the streets, men and women called on their Gods, children wailed for their mothers, and these shrieks mingled with the terrified voices of the beasts. On the roof-top, in the wind, the queen stood holding up her arms to the sky. "Allah is great, Allah is merciful! It is the end of the world!" she cried, and her voice was like the flute of the Arab that had sung of freedom.

The clouds passed. But no one doubted any longer that at midnight the comet would devour us.

That evening it was dazzling: larger than the morning star, it spread its tail across the whole sky.

TEHERAN

The queen and I reclined in our underground rooms, smoking a few pipes of opium. "Do you desire to see this world continue any longer?" she said. "I say to you that I would crush it all beneath my heel, like the egg of a scorpion. Nothing can issue from it but poison."

As for me, I loved the world then. And the sweet heavy scent of the opium filled me with an illimitable sorrow.

We mounted to the roofs. Lying upon a carpet, we watched in silence. Suddenly we saw the earth divide in two, and fall away into the infinite. We were on a bronze island surrounded by a phosphorescent sea that swallowed in its waves millions of human beings. The comet stopped, hesitated a moment, and then darted at us the thunderbolt that struck us dead. . . .

When we returned to life, in the bright morning, we were astonished and incredulous to see above us still the unchanged sky.

The Europeans had registered a rain of stars and announced that the comet was going away.

Life had resumed its monotony, which seemed more wearisome than before, when one day the brothers of the queen told us that on the next morning Justice would hang Prince M . . . es-Saltaneh.

He was a cousin of the queen. He had come from Odessa to restore the exiled Shah to his place upon the throne of Persia. Disguised as a muezzin, he had been going about in Teheran, and his party was almost ready to strike the blow that would have destroyed the Government, when he was betrayed, seized, and

PERSIA

condemned to die. A scaffold had already been erected on the great square before the Divan.

The queen lost consciousness when she heard this news. She lay for an hour without speaking or moving. Then a fever consumed her. Scarcely speaking, she walked up and down the garden paths, in and out of our rooms, without resting for a moment.

"We must be present at his death," she said to me, "so that he may know that I am there, and that my heart dies in seeing him die. That will help him to bear it. You will come with me."

"If you wish it," I said, my heart contracting.

"Our Government!" she said, spurning the word with her foot. And again, "Camel-drivers and masons!"

Through the whole night she walked up and down on the roof, like a drunken person. "If I could rescue him to-night!" she said, wringing her hands. "Persia is no longer governed; she is ruled by mule-drivers and the beggars of the bazaars. It is the vileness of the streets, the scum of horseponds, that is covering our gardens and our palaces." And again, "If he could be rescued! If there were some way of rescuing him to-night! Think, think, is there no way? I have a place where he could be hidden for years in safety!"

I could say nothing.

Early in the morning, heavily veiled, she and I were in a small room above the gates of the Divan Khane. On one side we saw the square overflowing with a crowd that had been there all night in order to see the spectacle; on the other side our windows overlooked the court of the Divan, where the judges were seated at a table waiting for the last formalities.

TEHERAN

The prince appeared, followed by guards. He was still a young man. His glance was proud, his gestures grave and restrained.

He replied negatively to all the questions that were put to him, and seemed eager to reach the scaffold. Beyond the walls, the impatient cries of the mob had been rising since dawn.

The judges ended their questions. The order to lead the prince to the scaffold was given, and two guards seized his arms brutally. A profound anger flamed in the prince. With an imperative gesture he freed himself, and approaching his judges he saluted them courteously. The judges were astonished for an instant; he asked a favour—to be allowed to sing before his death!

And facing our window he sang, his head uncovered, his little cap pressed against his breast; he sang like a true lover, his eyes half-closed, and an indefinable smile at the corner of his mouth. One felt in his song all his sorrow to die on this beautiful morning, all the anguish of the death that waited outside the walls, and the horror of the shades that would blot out for him the sunshine that would still caress the world.

He finished the song, bowed to his troubled judges, and walked toward the gates beyond which the crowd moaned like an ocean. He walked proudly beneath the archway.

The howling of famished beasts seizing their prey rose from the mobs. The executioners were placing the rope around the prince's neck.

In a few instants his body, with inert arms, was swinging in the air like a poor puppet. The throng, after an instant of silence, ran wild with ferocious joy.

PERSIA

"Monsters! Is THAT, then, humanity?" I thought, sickened. "Is THAT the people? This beast with a thousand heads?" It was not grief for the one man who had died that blackened my soul; it was a horror of all humanity.

"Were I a queen of long ago," I thought, "I would hang in one day all this throng of monsters."

The queen was slowly sinking on the floor, unconscious. Servants carried her to our carriage, and I felt that I was cruel in trying to bring her back to life that was so hideous.

That evening, again consumed with fever, she took me away from the city to a little garden, deserted and unwatered, where on the dry earth among dead stems of flowers there was only a tumble-down hut. An old man, nearly blind, received us in its one dirty room. The queen ordered him to open a little door in one wall and asked me to pass its threshold. Inside, I stood stupefied. Before me innumerable white columns supported Arabic arches that upheld the domes of great caverns lighted by feeble rays of sunlight. Rich rugs, soft divans, inlaid tables, lamps of pierced silver, gave a fantastic touch of splendour and luxury to these lofty rooms. This had been the secret temple of the Guiabres and Babists, their only refuge during the religious persecutions of Nasr-ed-Din Shah. The queen had bought it, probably for her love affairs.

"I would have hidden him here," she said. And prostrate on the stone floor, she wept.

A little while later, Teheran fêted the coronation of the young Shah.

It must be understood that in Persia we were no

TEHERAN

longer under the rule of the despots. We were in "marchroutie" (Constitutional Government), and we had a Medjlis. The former despot, Mahomet Ali Shah, had been exiled to Odessa, after having spent a few weeks on neutral soil ; that is to say, on the billiard table of the Russian ambassador, where he was allowed to sleep. But although we had a Constitution, it seemed that the lion-crested crown of his father must be forced upon the head of the little prince, fourteen years old. He was given for an heir his little brother, eleven years old.

The young king, weeping, begged them to take off this heavy hat and give it back to his father.

The heir began to laugh. The king lost his temper and ordered him hanged. But he learned that in "marchroutie" this power belonged only to the deputies.

"If I cannot even hang those I dislike, what kind of a king am I, then ?" the little Shah demanded, indignantly.

"Constitutional, sire," the courtier replied, bowing.

From that moment he abhorred his throne and was plunged into gloom. He wished neither to eat nor to amuse himself ; he turned his back upon the court and stubbornly refused to smile.

It was then that the queen and I thought of amusing him with a little entertainment, which we decided to give on the solemn occasion of his official accession to the throne. This entertainment might sweeten for him, we thought, the bitter ordeal of the ceremonies. But in order to give it we must be accompanied to the palace by another woman to act as our mother, and to find in all Teheran a third woman so audacious was a vain hope. The queen racked her brains.

PERSIA

“ Ah, saved ! ” she cried at last. “ There is a hermaphrodite in Teheran. She will consent to help us, without doubt.”

“ A hermaphrodite ? That word says nothing.”

“ But yes. She is of your country, too. They say the Caucasus is full of them.”

“ My Caucasus ? Hermaphrodites ? ”

She explained to me that they are the children of Caucasian women seized by the djinns, and that they have the power of transforming themselves sometimes into women, sometimes into men. It was a revelation to me. I had not only never met one in the Caucasus, I had never even heard them mentioned. I begged that she be brought.

She came ; she was a young woman with a very sweet contralto voice. She had fled from the Caucasus with a young girl who was escaping from tyrannical parents who had sold the child to the Tartars. An intelligent and cultured woman, she wished to earn her bread by teaching. But, hearing her masculine voice, the people believed her a child of the djinns and avoided her as one avoids the evil eye. Although in the baths she appeared simply as a young, slender woman, she was nevertheless refused registration in the schools, because it was supposed that she was a hermaphrodite who had transformed herself into a woman in order to deceive every one.

As a hermaphrodite, she was banished from Christian society, and as a Christian she found it impossible to work among the Mussulmans. Therefore, snared in this net of virtue, she and her young companion were dying of hunger. The Mussulmans, less virtuous than the Christians, had in simple charity sent them

TEHERAN

from time to time a little food. And finding herself welcome in the house of Envar-ed-Doule, our hermaphrodite wept with happiness, and kissing our hands asked only to obey our wishes.

Our difficulty was solved. We clapped our hands for joy, and busied ourselves with heaps of brocades, veils, silver and gold tissues and caskets of jewels, choosing the robes we should wear. Ah yes, beyond doubt I should have been wiser, more thoughtful, more prudent ! But I was wearied to death of monotony, my spirit was smothering, panting for freer air. I was young and reckless. As for the queen, she did not care for anything ; she sought only a little amusement to make her forget the burden of living.

Accompanied, then, by this child of a djinn, the queen and I went to give our little entertainment before the Shah on the evening of his coronation.

We appeared before the young Shah in the strictest seclusion. Every effort of the curious ambassadors who desired to see this unique spectacle was politely baffled.

Outside, about the palace, fire-dragons were brightening the dark sky and falling, hissing, into the ponds where the frightened willows hid their locks. Thousands of pine-torches threw a lurid light upon the high walls of the garden and the sombre silhouettes of noble Persian women, draped in black, grouped beneath the mournful cypresses.

Within the palace, in a little room draped with tapestries, servants helped us to remove our heavy veils. The moment arrived. A hand held back the drapery, and I entered the royal presence.

I found myself in a sumptuous hall paved with

P E R S I A

squares of marble. Stalactites of mirrors covered the ceiling and reflected thousands of lights that animated the voluptuous walls hung with golden brocades. The burning wax of the candles perfumed the arcades and filled me with a drowsy warmth.

On a throne of gold encrusted with jewels and surrounded by draped screens, the young Shah was seated. An attendant on either side fanned him, making the aigrettes of his crown waver like wisps of smoke. Beyond him, on a raised dais, stood the marble throne of Djimchide, the only grandeur that was left him from his ancestors of Persepolis.

I prostrated myself. Beyond the curtains the musicians touched the strings of the thars. Music softer than the light of the candles and sweet as their perfume stole through the golden draperies. I rose, spreading my veils like transparent wings, and advancing into the open space began my dance.

The reputation of the dancers of Persia, who were courtesans, prevented me from revealing freely to him all the grace of the Caucasians; modesty restrained my gestures. Beyond the curtains the musicians followed each motion with music. I expressed, with a poetry of movement as cool and chaste as the dawn, the awakening of the human soul to the beauty of love. When by chance my glance met that of the little Shah, he modestly lowered his beautiful velvety eyes. I then saw only the flash of the diamond lion which trembled on his forehead.

I was the first woman he had seen since he became king. Fearing that a woman would corrupt him, the courtiers had surrounded him only with young princes whose love they intended to replace all others. What

TEHERAN

a fate, to be compelled to remember in every moment of his life that behind his curtains eyes and ears as numerous as their arabesques recorded each of his gestures, each of his sighs ! In truth had he not the right, this unhappy king, to be a tyrant to this court which tyrannized over him even in the privacy of his alcoves ?

I vanished from his eyes through the curtains. The vizir of Dar-Bar thanked me warmly in the name of the Shah, and informed me that the Shah had commanded that the order of knighthood, Shir and Khorshid, be conferred upon me.

Imagine my joy ! I, a knight of the Lion and the Sun, the sun that I adore ! The queen and I returned to the house of Envar-ed-Doule talking of nothing else.

Alas, the following day, the Regent Naib-ed-Saltaneh being dead, there could not be found in the whole kingdom of Persia, emancipated as it was, any official who would sign this firman. What ! confer the Shir and Khorshid upon a woman ? One would have been obliged to revolutionize all the empires of Islam.

The whole kingdom talked of me. A thousand stories were invented about me, to thrill the bazaars, the baths, the birouns and indorouns. No one doubted that I had become a traitor to my religion. It was not true. I was, and I remain in spite of everything, a good Christian who believes in God and Paradise, without too much belief in Satan or in hell, the necessity of them appearing to me doubtful. If God has tolerated all our sins here below, where He has given us so many joys, why should He deprive us of Paradise ? And in any case, how would hell help us ?

But my piety, different from that of others, was in my

P E R S I A

own soul. The Christian world called me a heretic and a courtesan, and these terrible epithets were crowned with the name, "Daughter of Sodom and Gomorrah."

Too late, I perceived my imprudence. Who among the Christians could believe that the garden which separated the indoroun from the biroun had saved me from the indiscreet gaze of the young Mussulman princes? What evil were not loose tongues pouring upon my name?

These indignities penetrated like a blade of steel into my Armenian soul. All innocent as I was, I felt myself lost. Shame troubled my soul. I feared even violence, and left the house of Envar-ed-Doule only disguised or under cover of night. I knew that our Lord in Heaven does not trouble Himself to defend those who are attacked by evil tongues.

I must leave the house of Envar-ed-Doule. But to do that, I must go away from Persia. I valued too highly the respect of our patriarchal Armenian society to be able to endure returning, as a sinner, to the company of the austere Araratians. Where could I go? Fearful, I hesitated. Imagine how much courage I needed to go, alone, into countries far beyond the borders of everything I knew.

An incident occurred to end my hesitation.

I was returning from a fête which the most celebrated of the courtesans of Iran, Tadj-es-Saltaneh, princess and poetess, had given for her friends. A recklessness like that of the queen was beginning, in spite of my resistance, to harden in my own heart. Having nothing to lose, one can dare anything. And a curiosity, mixed, I confess it, with some fascination, had led

TEHERAN

me to that fête which was still intoxicating my senses.

Darkness was falling from the sky upon the crooked crowded streets. The muezzins were already chanting the evening prayers. Leaning on the cushions of the carriage behind its curtains, I thought of the high walls which enclosed the little palace of Tadj-es-Saltaneh, I saw again the arched galleries where we had lain stretched out on the cushions, and the little dancers who had enchanted our eyes. I remembered their frail, delicate bodies that rolled at our feet to the rhythm of the stringed instruments. Their childish hands caressed us ; trembling, they lay upon us, their heads on our throats, and covered us with their perfumed hair.

I thought of this courtesan daughter of a king, who preferred the intoxications of music and love to the boredom of a high place near the throne. I admired the fierce pride with which she supported the name of a depraved woman, and I highly esteemed her will to live as she chose and not to exist a slave to the will of others. But for myself, I felt tired and broken, and the sun fled from me.

Nearing the public baths, I was seized by a desire to lie on the hot slabs and let the servants softly splash my body with warm water. This repose would perhaps restore my power to think, to decide. The hour was late, I hoped to find myself alone. Wrapping myself in my veils, and commanding the carriage to wait, I hastened with trembling steps under the stone arches dimly lighted by pierced lamps.

I was mistaken. In the great room a few Christian women, crouched on the slabs, were finishing their dressing. Recognizing me, they drew back as though

P E R S I A

I were a leper. Seeing in a corner a very old Persian woman, dried and withered as a mummy, I went toward her. Two servants were washing her magnificent hair which fell down her horrible back and writhed on the stones.

I addressed her respectfully in Persian.

"Are you then indeed converted into a Mussulman, that you dare speak to me in Persian?" the shrew asked me in a furious voice.

"Forgive me, Khanoum," I said; "I thought that you were Persian."

She rose, trembling with anger, and cried in a hoarse voice, "What? I—I, Mogdoussi-Khanoum, Pilgrim of Jerusalem, I, a Persian!" And with her bony hands she threw upon me a pitcher of boiling water.

Happily, the women seized her hands in time to prevent my being scalded to death. Painfully burned, I fled toward my carriage, pursued by the scornful laughter of hate.

"Decidedly, decidedly, I must leave Persia," I thought, weeping in the carriage.

"Mogdoussi?" exclaimed the queen when I related the incident. "Why does your Prophet Messiah tolerate upon the earth her impious feet?"

I learned that half a century ago this shrew had been a veritable *hourî*. The English ambassador, having seen her one morning gathering figs at the entrance of her father's garden, was amazed at the antique quality of her grave and serene beauty. He sent at once to her parents and bought her for an enormous sum, and during ten years she was the delight of the old milord. A gentleman and a Christian, in leaving

TEHERAN

Persia to take for himself a wife among his own people, the ambassador sent Mogdoussi with her parents to kiss the tomb of the Redeemer. This having made them all saints, on their return from Palestine the Christian world welcomed them as this rank deserved. The old bowed to the earth, the children piously kissed the hems of their garments and begged their benediction.

This story dissolved all my perplexities. I decided to imitate the example of Mogdoussi ; that is to say, after having a little sinned, to go to kiss the tomb of Christ and then to return to my country to die highly respected.

A bishop warmly praised my intention, and gave me a letter addressed to our Patriarchs at Jerusalem. He recommended me highly to the Grand Pontiff, and asked for me the title of Mogdoussi. Sealed with the episcopal ring, this letter was carried against my heart.

I prepared myself then to leave Persia.

All the household of Envar-ed-Doule united in equipping me for the long journey. Having no confidence in banks, the queen and her mother fastened around my waist a belt heavy with gold coins. They suspended from one of my arms a silken purse filled with silver, and from the other a bag of copper money to be distributed to the beggars along the route. Several talismans, hung around my neck, protected me from demons or the evil eye of the wicked.

The thing which troubled me was a hard piece of paper called "Passport." Finding it impossible to carry anywhere, I at last adjusted it on my head in the folds of my hair. Every one assured me that among Europeans I would be taken for a rogue without this

P E R S I A

paper, and that if I lost it I would be locked in dungeons. This prospect so terrified me that every moment I assured myself that the paper was still in my coiffure.

The hour of my departure arrived. The camels waited outside the gates. The queen embraced me ; Nadir wept. Tahia, who was to be sent back to the house of Assatour-Khan, prostrated herself to kiss my feet. Little Suhun, holding her child in her arms, kissed my hands and splashed them with her tears. The Arabian groom laid at my feet a rose of Assyria and a pomegranate. Hadji-Khanoum, the decrepit old sinner, hobbling on her crutches, offered me the last possession she treasured—a dagger from the sacred land of Mecca and Medine. A little apart from the women the Princes Kemal, Zelil and Aboubekir, in their sarदारis of black silk and their astrakhan caps, stood with their heads bowed to their breasts and their arms crossed in the gesture of respect. Before the adorable old mother, Envar-ed-Doule, I prostrated myself in gratitude for the maternal affection she had shown me, a stranger and a Christian. She gave me her benediction.

I placed myself upon the back of the kneeling camel. With a grunt, he rose, lifting me high above the turban of his master. All was ready. With the slow motion of a boat on the waves, I was carried away from the iron gates beyond which I had been so loved and so happy. The noises of the streets surged around me, terrifying as the voice of a strange sea. I turned my head to see for the last time, through my veils, the walls of the safe harbour I was leaving for ever, but I could not see them for my tears.

Towards Jerusalem : *Across the Caucasus*

IT was evening. On the desert, between the vagueness of sky and the vagueness of the vast level earth, we made our little camp. A tiny fire cast red light and black shadow on the small tents of striped silk. The camels, kneeling, ate their handfuls of date-seeds from the handkerchiefs spread before them. Far away a jackal howled.

The full moon rose slowly, the desert became a lake of silver. The camels slept, the camel-drivers lay wrapped in their rugs. In their tents my two companions, old pilgrims going to Mecca, slept without a sound. The jackal was still.

In all the universe, no sound, no movement. Only the pale moon, drowning the stars in its light. Not a tree, not a blade of grass. No horizon, no border between the silver mist of desert and the silver mist of sky. The universe dissolved into the mystery of light.

In the silence, far away, a tinkling of little bells, the silver bells that follow with their rhythm the slow steps of the caravan camels. A voice comes out of the desert, singing to the moon.

It is the voice of the camel-driver, complaining of the solitude. It is the lament of the lonely soul, the thirst for the impossible, the longing of the fugitive for rest.

"Aman ! Ah aman !" He is reproaching life for its shadows of death, for the death that he sees in this sky.

TOWARDS JERUSALEM

in this moon that he adores and that soon he will no longer see. The song itself dies in the vast silence. It is gone. Where ?

Everything loses its contours. Where am I ? What am I ? A light melted into this immensity of light, lost, dissolved. . . .

An imperceptible melody touches my ears. Is it the song of the stars dancing around the moon ? Is it my body singing with happiness ? Is it my soul, reaching the unattainable ? It is the mystic rapture of being one with the night and the moon. It exists, then. . . .

The sun appears and restores form and outline to the earth. The desert is the desert, a floor of sand reflecting the heat of the solid sky. I am I, weary in a weary body. My soul is sobered ; no longer lost in immensities, it takes up the burden of to-day. Has it lost for ever the way to that mystic happiness ? No ; some day, somewhere, I shall find again that incommunicable happiness.

We reached Baku, where I stopped to embrace my mother. She lived in our old caravanseraï, the sole bits of debris left to us from the splendour of my childhood. Tired and worn with sorrows, she took me tenderly in her arms, and her tears fell on my cheek when she lifted her veils to kiss me.

In the bare rooms of this poor house a few bits of rare pottery and an antique mirror contrasted strangely with their surroundings. Rahim, the son of our Tartarian baker, had saved them for me, during the burning of our great house. When, after our ruin and the death of my father, he learned that I had been married and was in Persia, he had shed tears.

ACROSS THE CAUCASUS

"Allah bless Khanoum Gueusal," he said after a short silence. "I have a marriage present for her, may she deign to accept it."

Imagine my joy, after these years, to see again this mirror and these vases from our dear burned house ! At what risk he must have carried them away, in order to offer them to me !

He was married now, and no longer the son of a baker, but a baker himself. Though his shop was at the other end of the city, he still faithfully supplied my mother's household with bread, refusing all payment, and he still called her always, "Gonchi Khanoum ; Madame, my neighbour."

Sitting on the threadbare rugs, her hand in mine, my mother told me all these things, and asked me innumerable questions. The gossip of the Caucasians, whose fancy had woven the most fantastic stories about my wound, had informed her of that.

"Tell me," she asked, "what gave you this wound ?"

"A hunter, my mother ; a hunter who did not know that I was hidden in the grass."

"Kind God ! I might then have lost you, little flower of my garden !" She clasped me in her arms, and her adoring face, filled with tenderness, told me what happiness she must have given my father, she who was still so ardent and so beautiful.

She enclosed me within the garden of her love, as though her heart forewarned her of the fate that awaited me. However, she knew nothing of my life, and thought that he whose name I bore was waiting for me in Turkey.

As for me, knowing that I must in some manner provide for myself, I had the intention of dancing for

TOWARDS JERUSALEM

the Sultan during the festival of Bayram. The Turkish Empire was no longer ruled by the terrible Red Sultan, and to dance for a Turk who did not massacre Christians did not seem to me at all sinful. In those days we imagined that with the downfall of Abdul Hamid the world had forgotten for ever the words, war, massacre and tyranny. Remembering that my dances had pleased the Persian Shah, I confidently hoped to earn by my poetic art the praises of the Sultan as well, and to receive from him presents that would pave my way onward to Jerusalem.

The few days that I spent with my mother at Baku were varied by strange emotions. On the second day after my arrival I received a visit from Knarik (The Lyre), a young girl, frail and pathetic. She was enduring the tragedy of her life. The story that she poured into my ears was the refrain of the eternal song; she loved and had been loved; her lover had tired of her and loved another, and the jackals of jealousy and pride were tearing her heart.

"You, you too," she said, "I see it in your eyes—you are weary of life. Do you not desire always to die, to lie down in darkness and never rise again?" And she proposed that we should depart together for the other world.

At that moment the dark shores no longer allured me.

"All things pass," I said to her. "There is a way that will carry you across all the rivers of sorrow." And I counselled her to mock everything a little, especially herself.

Knarik was shocked by this advice.

"Seriously, Knarik, live for the sun," said I.

"For the sun . . ." she repeated, shrugging her

ACROSS THE CAUCASUS

shoulders. And she went away without saying another word.

That same evening we learned that she had poisoned herself. Her body lay unburied in the cemetery: the Christians refused to bury it. I wrapped myself in a cloak, determined to go to her, although my mother protested. A furious wind was rocking all the ships in the harbour; the very earth was flying from it in clouds of sand and small stones. "What comfort can you bring to the dead?" said my mother.

But it seemed to me that I could bring her back to life, that now I could find the right words to speak to her.

The streets were deserted. In the cemetery the cypresses bent groaning in the torrents of air. Beneath them Knarik lay in a coffin torn open by the wind. Her long and heavy hair crawled like serpents on the slabs. They were alive, those tortured locks; some rose into the air and coiled back in despair, others crept into the coffin to come out again, frightened. They trembled, they writhed, they suffered. And it seemed to me that from their midst she, the ardent and capricious Knarik, was speaking to me again of her love.

I fled, feeling that those serpents were running after me to crawl up my veils.

Naïve, as are all Orientals, Knarik had believed that death would unite her to her lover by indissoluble bonds. But he married soon afterward; he is now the father of a family, and nourishes tenderly a pretty little round stomach of prosperity.

To blot that memory from my mind, I went the

TOWARDS JERUSALEM

next day to visit the celebrated artist, Asnive (The Noble), who wished to read to me her memoirs. She was a beautiful girl, proud and gay, with eyes like black clouds in which the lightning sleeps. Her gestures were imperious, and her steps haughty. She received me in a rich room, among cushions of every colour and innumerable precious tables and mirrors.

She mocked the Knariks. Herself proud, passionate and commanding, she had conquered life, and forced it on its knees to give her everything she wished to have.

What had she not seen, this girl of Stamboul? Abandoned in the world, an orphan, penniless and hungry, at eleven years of age, she had become the imperious idol of all Turkey, she had aroused the passions of the Grand Pasha himself, played with him, flaunted him, refused him, preferring the joys of a wandering life to the dull respectability of a harem.

“And one day not long after,” she told me, “I was obliged to cut and sell my beautiful hair for a few pieces of gold. But what could I do? I had seen a beautiful brocade that I desired for a gown.”

I listened to her with admiration and envy. What would I not give for such a spirit? A spirit that disdained and broke all bonds, that feared nothing, dared everything, conquered and threw away without regrets, what an armour in which to fight the battle of life, the battle in which every one is wounded to death! She began to read to me her memoirs.

She had begun her career in the Great Square of Stamboul, during the fête that celebrated the circumcision of the sons of the Sultan. These fêtes lasted weeks; the streets were a blaze of lights, the coffee-houses crowded, the gardens filled with song and

ACROSS THE CAUCASUS

feasting until dawn. From all this she rose like a fire-dragon into the sky of Stamboul, a dancer for whom the city went mad. Her feet walked on men's hearts, her caprices beggared the wealthiest; they called her "Eyes of Fire."

For four years she had upset the hearts of all Asia; she had danced, sung, loved, hated, and now, still young, she had retired from the feasts to keep them in her memory before a hearth-fire at the borders of the Caspian Sea.

While she was reading to me her record of these memories, a little monster, a senselessly grinning idiot, came in and offered me a tray on which were cups of Turkish coffee. I trembled with horror.

"He is my child," Asnive said to me, "the chastisement of my sins, the victim of one of my angers."

In one of her fits of passion she had beat upon the floor the head of this miserable child.

I came away from her house, uncertain whether I most admired or regarded with horror the beautiful Asnive.

That evening I went to the house of my Aunt Narcissus, to condole with my cousin Sathis in her sorrow; death had taken from her her young husband.

"Sister," she said to me, weeping, "if you had seen his face beautiful and serene in his shrouds, you would not have been able to believe that on his death-bed, while he was dying, he tried to strangle me in order to take me with him into the other world."

I returned to my mother's house, troubled. After melancholy and gentle Persia, the Caucasus appeared to me tragic and horrible. It was no longer the Cau-

TOWARDS JERUSALEM

casus of my childhood, the Caucasus of orchards and fruitful vines, where I had so much loved the song of the grasshoppers and the murmur of the cascades. It was now the Caucasus of the passionate and romantic soul, barbarous and cruel, indomitable in its rebellious barbarism. I found myself alien to all these dramas of naked souls and unchained passions.

To reach the shores of the Black Sea in the west I must cross the Caucasus from one end to the other, and I planned to stop at Tiflis, where my Aunt Vosky (Gold) lived with her daughter Astrik (Star). Georgia was the country of my grandmother, a Mingrelienne, and my imagination pictured brightly a visit of several days among the care-free Georgians.

I should say just what Georgia is. In the official schools we were told that Georgia was a province of Russia, of which the largest city was Tiflis. That was all we were taught about it. At home, my father said to us, "The beautiful kingdom of Georgia, of which Tiflis is the capital, is the heart of our Caucasus."

Knowing the peculiar story of Georgia, it is difficult to say which opinion was right. The kingdom had been indeed independent. But the chiefs of Mingrelie, of Imerethis, and of Cachetie, three different Georgian tribes, disputed without ceasing. The neighbouring tribes, heathen and Mussulman, profited by these disputes to invade the Georgian territory. Tired of these endless quarrels, and exhausted by combat against the nomads, the King of Georgia decided to ask help of the Tsar. He had a document prepared, praying for the protection of Russia, and having sealed it with his seal he took the noblest of his princes

ACROSS THE CAUCASUS

and went himself to offer the document to the Tsar.

He was received in St. Petersburg with the best grace in the world. To show the honour in which he was held at the Russian court, the Tsar placed his own body-guard around the Georgian king, and himself generously urged the princes to keep their own costumes. These garments, of a dazzling and noble picturesqueness, added to the beauty of the Caucasians, made the princes the sensation of all St. Petersburg. They were the favourites of the court, and the noble Russian ladies neglected no efforts to make them forget their homesickness for their mountains.

Unfortunately, their king soon died, and little by little the princes, in the midst of fêtes and entertainments like those of Paradise, ceased to think of their beautiful Georgia, and sold to the Russians their castles built among the cliffs.

Soon after the death of the king the document that he had brought vanished in the enormous archives of the Tsar. For convenience, too, the name of Georgia disappeared, being replaced by "the province of Tiflis." And all this happened so quietly that without suspecting it Georgia had become a part of the Russian Empire.

Only a few faithful patriots still remembered the kingdom of Georgia and dreamed of her recovered independence. They met in quiet places among their cliffs to consider what steps to take. But these conferences ended in disputes with the Armenians among them, who demanded, when Georgia was freed, the little bit of the country called Zangueczour, which Armenian horsemen with the aid of a fire-dragon had conquered a little while before the Flood. And the

TOWARDS JERUSALEM

discussions ended with the clashing of drawn daggers, until the Cossacks arrived and carelessly dispersed the patriots.

Next day, the good wine of Cachetie made them forget it all, patriotism and independence and the little bit of Zanguezour. Gathered around a blazing bonfire, they sang and danced to the sound of the tambourines. And from time to time, remembering the prison-fortress of Metzket where their chiefs languished in dungeons, their blood flamed with desire for vengeance, they swept the air with horns filled with foaming wine, and threatened the Tsar to burn all Russia on their wood-pile.

The fête which these Georgians gave for the viceroy on my arrival in Tiflis completely upset that old man.

In a ring of blazing torches he sat helpless while a number of handsome mountaineers executed before him the Dance of the Swords, while I danced in the midst of the flashing blades the famous "lezguinka" of the mountains. His face whirled before me, pale with terror; his trembling hands clutched the arms of his great chair; he turned his head piteously from side to side. And when, thrusting our naked swords toward him with our habitual abandon, we caught a glimpse of his eyes amidst the glittering of the steel, they were staring like those of a trapped animal.

The viceroy died a few days later. Perhaps the emotions he had felt had contributed to shorten his days.

After this fête, I was offered two banquets. The first was in a great house, among the Society of Tiflis, and left me few memories. But the second, given me

ACROSS THE CAUCASUS

by a sword-merchant, was one of the most singular of all my life.

We settled ourselves on the divans around the table at noon, and did not leave them until dawn.

During the whole day, I heard only, "Flower of my soul, taste this; it is made expressly for you. Light of our eyes, this little partridge was killed for you alone, and the raisins with which it is stuffed were gathered by my grandfather, who tastes at this moment the celestial grapes in the vineyards of Our Father and His Son and the Holy Ghost." Here, at the sound of these sacred names, a large sign of the cross, repeated by the entire assembly.

"And this good wine of Cachetie, and this melon from Charjou—eat, little dove. Deign to accept these grapes from Ourmi, and this dish of our grain, which the sun has ripened in expectation of your coming. Bright-winged Queen Bee, this morning I rose before the dawn, that I might offer you an unforgettable souvenir—ah, here it is!" And there was set before me a bowl filled with the milk of mares.

Could I draw back before such splendour of good will?

But my situation became every moment more desperate before this obligation to eat everything urged upon me by this excellent merchant, who thought me thin and assured me that plumpness would beautify me.

And I ate. I ate with the resignation of a martyr, of a saint. I ate desperately without seeing or hearing, until even my imagination could no longer picture a miracle that would rescue me from this fête.

After twelve hours of eating, at midnight the appearance of a whole new series of dishes overcame me; I began to weep.

TOWARDS JERUSALEM

“It is loneliness,” the kindly merchant explained to the astonished guests. “This unfortunate little one has only an aunt in all this immense Tiflis. Ehe, you!” he called to the musicians, “sing for this orphan! Sing, ‘O my native prairies, mountains and abysses.’ And you, little core of my soul, dry your tears and taste this honey made by your own wild bees of Shamahka.”

And again the musicians began to sing, and I—to eat. Toasts in my honour, jewelled with incredible hyperboles, mingled with the songs of the musicians. From time to time some one would dance, accompanied by clapping of hands from the whole assembly. And all these sounds, this movement, the lights reflected on silver and copper and silks, had for me the quality of a nightmare. I saw them as one in the delirium of torture sees the heated irons and the shadows of his tormentors, and I swallowed, swallowed desperately and for ever, while from time to time a tear stole down my cheek.

Finally, at the first crow of the cock, I was permitted to reach my bed.

That same evening I was to dance again, because, the first success having turned my head, I had promised to dance a second time at the Opera. We have, then, an Opera! Ah yes, indeed, the ugly centre of Tiflis, European with a colouring of Russia, offers everything that the Parisian finds at home, here in the capital of Georgia.

Therefore at noon my aunt aroused me, and to overcome the effects of that incredible banquet she led me to the warm baths that spout from the rocks near Tiflis.

After spending a few hours lying in the pools of

ACROSS THE CAUCASUS

nearly boiling water that smell like rotten eggs, we came out dying with fatigue. A long robe covered my trembling body, a few shawls draped my head and shoulders. Surrounded by all their tinsel, my nose shone like a poppy in bloom. My very eyeballs, like those of the owls, were encircled with red.

"Let us stop to see my new jewels," my aunt proposed, halting our carriage before the shop of a jeweller.

"Very well," I said, past caring about my appearance.

The jeweller showed us some designs, but hurriedly and without interest. He feared that the delay would cost him his chance to get a place at the Opera, to see the charming dancer of Shamahka. He spread before us with a careless hand the golden ornaments that he had chiselled, in which we saw reproduced, beneath the contours of mountains as light as clouds, fantastic peacocks, eagles and gazelles. He poured upon us extravagant praises of the dancer, more beautiful than the moon and the evening star, more graceful than smoke in a gentle breeze.

Vosky glanced at me laughing.

"More beautiful than my niece?" she asked him.

The jeweller looked at me with disdain. "I do not wish to say that your niece is ugly," he replied; "but it is impossible to compare the day with the night."

"Have you then lost the light of your eyes?" my aunt laughed. "For here is your dancer of Shamahka."

"Aunt!" I cried, to stop her, but it was too late.

It was not at all vanity that spoke in me. No, but here I saw an artist with a soul. In the jewels that he created I saw the artist's dream of the impossible beauty. I saw mountains like those that touch celes-

TOWARDS JERUSALEM

tial skies, creatures that browse on the flowers of Paradise. The lakes he had designed were circles filled with winged fish. Undoubtedly his imagination had made of his dancer a being also as unreal, as winged and golden as his designs. In identifying my person with that of the Almée who had kindled his soul at the fête of the torches, my aunt had assassinated his dream.

The poor jeweller could not at first believe it. But seeing my denials sincerely contradicted by my aunt, "Oh, what have you told me, madame!" he said sadly, his eyes filling with tears. I, too, was on the verge of weeping.

It was then that I understood that a dancer is more than a woman; that she is a dream, and that to preserve it she should show the world only her unreal self.

Perhaps some day I shall regret having shown in these pages the reality behind the veils. But . . . It amuses me for the moment; that is all I ask of these pages.

The morning after my success at the Opera, three youths of Akoulis came to beg me to take part in a fête which was to be given for Mary, the Mother of Christ, in their city.

"We wish to play 'The Brigands,' by Schiller. The heroes of that play are not very different from us. As for scenery, what more could we desire than our own cliffs? Will you play the rôle of Amalie?"

"But I have no European robes."

"A long Caucasian chemise and unbound hair is all that is necessary."

"But what will the rôle be?"

"You read something to Franz, an old, ugly creature

ACROSS THE CAUCASUS

who is in love with you, while all your dreams are for Carlos, the bandit. You will have to weep a little."

"It is, then, a tragedy! Never would I know how!"

"You need only sigh at each word."

Their prayers were so moving and their sorrowful eyes so pleading that at last I consented.

That afternoon I left Tiflis to accompany them to their city, a former Armenian capital hung above an abyss in the heart of the wild mountains that surround Mount Ararat. Never will I forget that journey up the savage cliffs, once drowned beneath the waters that carried the ship of the patriarch Noah.

The sun was descending when, the mules being unable to climb higher on the precipitous trails, we dismounted from the saddles to go on foot. The desert and the cliffs were a reddish mauve beneath a sky rosy with sunset. The air was the colour of red wine. Our flesh appeared to be of bronze, and it seemed to me that our very robes exhaled light.

Akoulis, capital of Armenia before the days of Ghen-gis Khan, has kept its air of primitive times. Within its walls, amid houses cut in the living rock and covered with wild vines, a torrent with a thousand cascades falls into an abyss. The hundreds of rifles fired in honour of my arrival did not cover the sound of its roaring. We were met by Ovi, the young ruler of Akoulis, who led me to his house, where I was received by all the chief men of the city. Ovi, a veritable hero of Schiller's fancy, was to play the part of Carlos.

And we played Schiller, on the verge of the cascade. Our audience crouched upon the roofs, clung to the branches of the trees, hung on the vines. A row of torches were our footlights, the roar of the waters our

TOWARDS JERUSALEM

orchestra, and the sighs of the listeners mingled with sighs of the trees. It was a setting truly Schillerian.

The fame of the spectacle reached even Lower Akoulis in the depths of the abyss. A delegation came, begging us to show "the European bandits" to them.

We consented.

After the play, by the light of torches, we placed our theatrical costumes upon an ass, and began the climb back to Upper Akoulis. The moon lighted our way. The climb up the walls of the cañon was almost perpendicular. I was advised to cling to the tail of the ass, which I did, and the ass, accustomed thus to aid the women of these mountains, generously supported my steps.

Arriving weary at the house of Ovi, we could not leave the beauty of the Araratian night. We mounted to the roof and remained awake, sitting at the edge of this flat rock which was the verge of the precipice.

The poplars trembled in a wind. Small and pale, the moon hastened through the clouds. On the heights above us a storm thundered like an old man in anger, and the cascades, frightened, flung themselves into the darkness far below. The abyss became darker and darker. The white cliffs that walled it seemed a tomb. An ocean of fog rose to the rim of the mountains. The abyss was swallowed in its waves; only our roof-top remained visible on a white sea.

I thought of Noah. In his ark he must have felt himself as isolated and lost in space as we upon this roof.

It was with sincere regret that I left that savage and beautiful spot guarded from the world by jagged and indomitable cliffs. Accompanied by the sound of tam-

ACROSS THE CAUCASUS

bourines from all the roofs, I said farewell to my host and began to descend the trails. An escort of mountaineers accompanied me as far as Djoulfa, where I embarked on a train for Batoum.

That train, as rapid as a caravan of camels, enchanted me. Rarely does one see in our countries such a marvel.

Under lock and key, in one of its boxes, I felt myself a prisoner. The motion of the train, its noise and its speed, combined with the sense of those enclosing walls to terrify me. But the amiable conductor stopped the train whenever we asked it, and allowed us to gather flowers, to chase butterflies, or to rest from the fatigue of the journey on sunny hill-sides. For all that, we travelled with almost the speed of a caravan, and arrived at Batoum in four days.

The Black Sea roared before me. Its waves spat foam on the shores. For the first time I lost heart for the journey, and asked myself why I had undertaken to venture alone among all the perils of the world.

“Why is it called the Black Sea?” I asked.

“Because,” I was told, “its sombre sky shadows its waves and whirlpools filled with the dead.”

That night, I well remember, I slept badly.

Towards Jerusalem : *Constantinople and Greece*

I HAD left the Caucasus three days before, on a little boat that miserably made its way across the stormy waves of the Black Sea. It was dawn. We were entering the waters of the Bosphorus. On the deck, wrapped in a cloak, I stood watching the sky grow light. In the grey waters rocks as sharp as the teeth of sea-monsters showed here and there. They were the Islands of the Princes.

Before us appeared the cupolas, the minarets, the wooden houses of Constantinople. Thousands of boats passing beneath the bridges gave the city a merry aspect.

For thirty years the hate of Abdul Hamid for the race of his mother, an Armenian dancer, had made of this city a slaughter-house. For thirty years not an Armenian could enter or leave it, under pain of death.

I had letters to many friends of my friends, who offered to show me Constantinople. My first visit was to the mosque of Aya Sophia. The exterior, encumbered with crowded buildings, told me nothing. Its coloured walls still bore traces of the Grecian paintings of Byzance, which had been covered by a rough layer of whitewash. Only a wing here, a head there, appeared to protest against the barbarism of the conquerors.

Within, the immense dome gave me an impression of the infinity of the sky. I understood why the fierce

CONSTANTINOPLE AND GREECE

Sultan Mahomet himself, entering it on horseback, had been overcome by the genius of the artist who had created this temple.

"It is indeed the house of God," he said, and he dismounted from his saddle. But the sincerity of his admiration did not at all hinder the good Mussulman from defacing the precious paintings, because according to Mohammed the prophet, images profane the Divine.

I decided to spend my short time in Constantinople in learning that which most interested me : the Turkish woman and her art of the dance. Therefore, instead of dancing for the Sultan, I conceived the idea of giving a charitable spectacle among Turkish women, knowing that my dances, the Persian music and my Caucasian robes would greatly interest them.

Two Armenians, who at that time occupied the happy posts of vizirs, proposed that I should present this idea to the Turks. I was invited to a meeting of the Committee of Beneficence.

I arrived, then, in a magnificent hall. A few Turkish officers, appearing to be amiable, questioned me in French to prevent my speaking the Tartarian of the Caucasus which they did not understand. They suggested that, instead of giving a fête for the women, I organize a grand gala performance for the men, which the ladies would be invited to see from *loges* hung with black veils.

I hesitated, asking myself if the Christians would not be shocked to see me dancing in my light robes before the Turks. To gain time, I asked to what purpose the receipts would be devoted.

TOWARDS JERUSALEM

"To the building of the new Ottoman fleet," they replied.

"Well," I answered, laughing, "I am sure that my compatriots will applaud me if I give this fête on the condition that during the massacres the fleet will be friendly to the Armenians."

I had forgotten that I was in Turkey, and that one does not speak of the rope in the house of the hangman.

A sombre silence was my reply. Frightened by the effect of my words, I sought vainly a relenting glance. A brutal anger was revealed in every face.

"Since you speak to us of massacres, Effenden," one of the officers said at last, "permit me to tell you that, if the Armenians are massacred, it is because they themselves wish it."

"I regret, sir, that I cannot understand the pleasure of having one's self massacred," I replied coldly, rising to leave. He tried to detain me to explain how the Armenians bring the massacres upon themselves, but in my anger I did not dare even to discuss the absurdity.

It is as Anatole France said in his discourse at the Sorbonne: "As the unhappy inspire most men with distaste, one seeks to find the fault in the victims, reproaching them for their weakness. Some, taking up the defence of the butchers, show them as chastising sedition, or revenging the Turkish population upon Christian usurers."

We alone, Armenians and Turks, know the true causes of the slaughter; the fear of the Turks that their country will be taken from them in fifty years by the Armenians, who multiply themselves as do all conscientious races, and the hatred of a barbarous

CONSTANTINOPLE AND GREECE

conqueror for the superior culture of a defeated people.

Regaining my own house, I reminded myself that it is hardly six centuries since the Turks abandoned their nomad life, and that in installing themselves at Stamboul (the very name means " Found "), they found the Greeks and the Armenians, who gave to the Occident and to Asia Minor their ancient culture. Fifteen centuries ago, the Armenian archives contained already the most precious parchments, from which the bards of all countries drew knowledge. It is easily understood that the only means by which a conquering barbarian can subdue a people of superior culture is to exterminate them. This slaughter is the only defence which Turkey has against a culture which imposes itself by its inherent value, and which in reality will everywhere dominate barbarism.

Yet I greatly admire the Turkish women, who are truly beautiful and worthy of admiration. But is this beauty not due to those innumerable beautiful Armenians who, during six centuries, have coloured the blood of the high-checked Mongolian race? Europe does not know the numbers of adolescents who have disappeared into the Turkish harems. How many times, in six centuries, we have received the order to present on such a day so much gold, so many horses, and so many virgins and youths! And all this youth and beauty, become Mussulman by force, has disappeared into the harems, to contribute there its grace to the next Turkish generation.

All these reflections, however, did not prevent my rash words from ending my first attempt to approach the Turk.

TOWARDS JERUSALEM

There still remained for me to know the Turkish women. I awaited impatiently the visit of a lady which had been announced to me. She arrived one day at my house, preceded by a servant, both concealed in black veils.

They unveiled themselves. The lady was a young Turk about twenty years old. Her eyes, in spite of her smile, expressed sorrow. She sharply reminded me of some one. All my mind was given to the search for that elusive resemblance. What was my surprise when I realized at last that she reminded me of—myself!

After the customary greetings I offered them coffee, and waited for them to explain the aim of their visit.

We were seated upon a broad divan, the servant squatting near us on the carpet. Lit by the sun, my house was like a lantern sailing above the waters of the Bosphorus. A voluptuous wind came softly through the windows, bringing the distant murmur of the city.

“My name is Nasle Khanoum,” said the young Turk. “All Stamboul knows of me.”

“My mistress is the most beautiful of all the women of Stamboul,” said the servant, thus revealing to me that she had been the lady’s nurse.

“I have learned,” continued the lady, “that you wish to give a fête in public. I have come to propose to you a small intimate entertainment, for the pleasure of my friends. Would you be willing to come to my house? If you think that loose tongues might speak lightly of this little affair, ah, well! we will collect a few paras, which we will distribute next day to the poor. Does the idea please you, Khanoum?”

I found the idea amusing, and, thinking that I saw before me one of the most renowned of Turkish

CONSTANTINOPLE AND GREECE

courtesans, I accepted the offer. She hugged me delightedly, kissed me with tenderness, and uttered a thousand charming compliments. Seeing my photograph, she kissed it and hid it beneath her robes. Then, always laughing, and speaking rapidly, sometimes in French, sometimes in Turkish, she left, delighted by my promise.

I called my servant, an Armenian of the provinces, who hardly knew her own language, speaking only Turkish, as many do who fear the massacres and prefer to pass for Turks, although in their hearts remaining fervent Christians.

"Do you know some one who is called Nasle Khanoum?"

"Every one knows her better, Effenden, than the light of his own eyes."

"Who is her father?"

"A great pasha, Effenden."

"And her mother?"

"A Christian like myself, Effenden. But God keep you from saying to her that her mother was Christian. She would tear your eyes out."

"Where is she, this mother?"

"May God illumine her soul and open to her the gates of Paradise! At the age of thirteen years she was led to the harem of the Pasha, she was baptized Mussulman, and her name Hamass was changed to Fatma. She went from this world at the end of a few years of tears and sorrow. Nasle is her daughter."

"Is she married, this Nasle?"

"Unhappily, Effenden, no. Being mocked for her Christian origin by the children of the other wives of the Pasha, she was unable to endure their insults. She

TOWARDS JERUSALEM

fled to her nurse, who brought her up as her own daughter."

"And her father has never reclaimed her?"

"If she were a boy, Effenden, he would certainly do so, but she is a girl, and therefore of no value, as you know. She was left to live as seemed good to her. However, Effenden, what does it matter how one lives? All of us will one day go under the earth, and the good will be food for worms, no less than the wicked."

This story interested me very much, and I impatiently awaited the day of the fête, when I would see Nasle Khanoum again.

She lived in the purely Asiatic quarter, among the vegetable markets, in a street where the merchants went by singing their merchandise. The exterior of the house was poor, the court was small and dingy. But on entering the doors I felt an atmosphere intimate and picturesque. Divans along the four walls continued even as far as the moucharabia. The corners of the rooms, draped with tapestries, formed little tents, lighted by silver lamps encrusted with mother-of-pearl.

Nasle came flying to me, chattering French and Turkish together. In an instant I was surrounded by perhaps twenty Turkish women, who all talked at once. One said that her mother was ill, and wept. Every one embraced and consoled her, offering her cups of coffee, drying her tears and begging her to laugh. We settled ourselves upon the divans, taking little cups of coffee and cigarettes from the trays which servants offered. Every one was animated, gay and childishly unrestrained.

CONSTANTINOPLE AND GREECE

One after another the women danced and sang. The sensuous songs and the chromatic scales shocked my ears. I found this strange succession of notes harsh and painful, and few of their dances reminded me of the Caucasus. They were more sensuous and much less spiritual than ours.

I showed them some of my dances, accompanying myself with the grave songs of my country. When I had finished them and seated myself beside Nasle, I found her sad. She leaned her pretty head upon my shoulder.

"I love your songs," she said. "They remind me of those my mother sang to me in my infancy," and she wept.

"Why do you weep, Nasle?"

"I do not know," she replied.

I pressed her against me. Perhaps I had awakened in her the consciousness of her origin, she who carried in her veins the Aryan blood of her mother.

"Will you be my sister for one night?" she asked me, drying her tears.

"Always," I replied. "What is it you desire? Tell me."

"Stay here in my home to-night."

"Yes."

She clapped her hands, laughing like a happy child.

When the other guests had gone, her nurse dressed us in long chemises and hid our hair in turbans. Seeing me appear thus as a Turk, Nasle laughed for minutes together, like a crazy person. The old nurse served us a little dinner upon a copper tray, and after bringing us fresh water in which to wash our hands, she left us alone together.

TOWARDS JERUSALEM

Squatting on either side of a brazier, warming our hands, we spent the whole night gossiping. From time to time, caressing my bare arms and my hair, Nasle said to me in her lazy voice, "Aman, aman! How beautiful you are! If I were only your husband!"

In spite of seeming so open and sincere by nature, she disclosed to me nothing whatever of her life. What she learned of mine was all that I myself knew.

When I spoke of love she said, "As for me, no. I would not love even a vizir. Men are all alike; only their robes are different. The heart of none of them is worth the paring of a finger-nail." She spoke with sincerity.

Angry to have confided to her all my soul, I courteously left her house in the morning, and did not see again that artful one who concealed all her thoughts beneath the appearance of so much intimacy.

A few days later I visited the house of a great Turkish lady, where I found nothing interesting. The furnishings were European, a style that has always appeared to me tiresome and without beauty. The women came hidden beneath their veils, but when they rid themselves of these coverings, I saw before me the Khanoums of Bouk-Dere, corseted and dressed like Frenchwomen.

One played on a piano the sonatas of Chopin, the waltzes of Schumann. Another recited verses of Lamartine and of Musset.

As I did not find picturesque these Asiatics with their European pretensions, I left this house early without having been amused.

CONSTANTINOPLE AND GREECE

It was night when I arrived at my gates. A desperate barking seemed to come from a distance. What was my horror to see near my knees the distorted face of a man who barked like a dog, his eyes full of sadness.

The blood became snow in my veins. I tried to cry out, but had no voice. Happily, the door opened, and I was supported half-fainting into the house.

He was a man bitten by a mad dog. In Constantinople, madness is considered incurable, and these unfortunates are abandoned to die in the streets.

The Turkish house in which I lived on the shores of the Bosphorus adjoined that of two Frenchwomen who had come from Paris to teach their language in the capital of Turkey. They lived there with two Arabian officers, pupils who had become their masters. The two teachers, young and pretty, were deeply in love with these handsome and charming men. A little girl of sixteen years, Annette, served them all.

On the other side of my house I had as neighbour a Georgian whose temples were white with age. He had never spoken to me, but in the evenings he sat at the window of his moucharabia and played for hours the melodies of my country. Every night I went to sleep carried into mists of happiness by the little silver boat of his music.

One evening as my lids were closing I was aroused by a knocking at my door. "Who can be coming at this hour?" I asked myself, in surprise. My servant was asleep. I opened the door.

It was Annette. Pale and faltering, she wept.

"What is the matter, poor Annette?" I asked,

TOWARDS JERUSALEM

taking her in my arms. Silently she held out the corpse of a tiny infant.

Trembling with horror, I supported her towards my bed. What was to be done? "Do not tell my mistresses! O my God, do not tell them!" she begged me, fainting. Her life seemed to be ebbing away; her hands were growing cold and her heart hardly beat. I dared not call the servants, whose gossip would spread the story through all the bazaars.

Suddenly an idea came to me. I went to my window, opened it, and knocked at the panes of the Georgian. They opened, and I saw the astonished face of my kindly old neighbour. "At such a late hour?" said his surprised eyes.

"Do not awaken anyone," I said to him in our own language. "Come to me quickly."

In a moment he came in, perturbed. In the light of the lamp by my bed he saw Annette. I was trying to pour a few drops of wine between her white lips.

"She is dying," I said. "Help me to save her." I showed him the child. He paled and drew back.

"Horrible!" he murmured. Then, "A doctor must be called."

He hurried away. When he returned with an old doctor, there was still time to save Annette. The doctor promised to cover the tragedy with his silence, but he would not take away the little body. "I do not take charge of that," he repeated firmly.

The Georgian took my trembling hand. "Do not be afraid," he said. "To-night we will bury it in the Bosphorus. Until I return, keep it under lock and key in one of your chests."

That day was the most wretched of my whole life.

CONSTANTINOPLE AND GREECE

At evening, when I had dismissed the servants, the Georgian entered through the window. He wrapped in paper the little dead child, which seemed to be sleeping. Profoundly moved by the little stiff body, we were silent.

Wrapped in my veils, I met the Georgian outside my gates, and we hastened to the water's edge without saying a word. The Georgian helped me into a little boat. "I have rented this skiff for the whole night," he said. "I am a good rower, and if you like, we may stay on the water until dawn."

The Bosphorus was more beautiful than a dream. We seemed to be in an immense palace whose sapphire walls were thickly set with diamonds. In the mirror of the water the silver fire of the stars crossed the golden fire from the windows of Turkish houses. Many little boats were gliding in and out of the shadows of the bridges. They were filled with passengers who laughed and sang. Their stringed instruments scattered clear notes behind them. Sharp exclamations of boatmen, song and music coming from the cafés, salty odours of the sea, nocturnal barking of dogs, white wraiths of minarets—it seemed to me that I was in the midst of a splendid fête where a gay and nonchalant humanity gave itself freely to the embraces of joyous life.

Far from the peopled ways, among the sleeping reeds, the body of the child went slowly to the waters' depths.

We were soon in the open Bosphorus, in the path of the moon. To bring me forgetfulness, the Georgian sang his mountain songs. Our boat swayed gently, following the caprice of wind and water. Like a great beehive, the city slept. Seagulls tore the air with

TOWARDS JERUSALEM

their spasmodic cries ; dolphins played heavily in the waves.

“ Soon he will be eaten by the crabs, the little child to whom birth and death were one,” I thought. It seemed to me that all the border reeds were reproaching the world because he would never know the strange keen flavours of life.

“ Oh, if he had been born in the house of Envar-ed-Doule ! ” I thought ; “ how tenderly this little light would have been sheltered. But on the borders of the West the breath of civilization has extinguished it before it burned.”

I felt a cold wind blowing upon me from the darkness that lay over those strange lands. Already a chill was entering my blood, that had been so warmed by the sun of the East.

After a spectacle given for the Validé-Sultane upon a little island the name of which I have forgotten, I was persuaded to leave Constantinople for Egypt, to appear in the grand fête that X . . . Pasha was giving on the anniversary of the Khedive's coronation.

This journey would allow me to see Greece, the country of romance and legend, so much sung by our poets under the name of Iounane.

To prepare myself for seeing with my eyes this beautiful country I set myself to reading Homer. His name had been known to me from my infancy, for the biography of Ferdousi, which my father made us learn by heart, began with these words, “ The poet Ferdousi, the Homer of Persia . . . ” This began and ended all my knowledge of Homer.

As much as Ulysses displeased me by his unscrupulous

CONSTANTINOPLE AND GREECE

tricks, his mean-spirited prudence, and his stupidity, so much Homer himself captivated me by his descriptions of nature and of the customs of the Greeks. I found myself at home in his pages. I found there the same patriarchal manners that are ours, the same custom of the women to veil themselves and to live separated from the men. The same garments, the same weapons, the same improvised beds in the alcoves, just as we have them at home. The same hospitality, and the same sincere respect for foreigners and for age.

In going to Greece, then, I would not find myself in a strange land.

But when, after passing the imposing Dardanelles among the grey walls of the rocks, I disembarked in Greece, I found there more of European Turkey of to-day than of the Greece of Homer. The type of the Greeks little resembled the homeric figure of Ulysses. Small, swarthy and agile, they were more like the debris of a great civilization, as their beautiful ruins are the debris of their great cities.

The ruins of the Acropolis and of the Parthenon ! What pure and harmonious beauty ! These fragments alone would make me humble before antiquity. I kissed the marble body of a goddess ; time had made it rosy as the skin of a blonde, and the sun had given it the warmth of living flesh. What barbarian, to break the frescoes of Philiass, in order to carry them away as trophies and lock them in the cold walls of museums !

The sun was sinking on the red horizon. Rose-coloured was the dry country-side, rose-coloured the contours of the mountains. This modern Athens made me regret the Athens of long ago more than the

TOWARDS JERUSALEM

bazaars and gardens of Persia made me regret the Persia of Cyrus and of Haroun-al-Raschid.

I realized that the beautiful antiquity of Greece exists to-day only in my country, where it has been preserved unchanged in the amber of our reverence for ancient traditions.

Towards Jerusalem : *Egypt*

A YELLOW line traced between the sea and sky, a few palm trees, frail and motionless—that is Egypt.

We disembarked at Alexandria, by the lighthouse which the ancients counted among the seven wonders of the world.

The catacombs. We entered there, Arabian lanterns lighting for us the way that seemed to descend toward hell. The bones, the urns, the cold and darkness, all spoke of the adoration which the austere Egyptians offered to Death. These walls, decorated with golden images, were once witnesses of the Egyptians in embroidered tunics, who descended these steps, lighted by their torches, to render homage to their dead. Humid, gloomy and bare, they repulse me now by their nakedness. Quick, quick, let us fly from this tomb toward the sunlight !

Leaving, I sought everywhere traces of Cleopatra. In a fragment of ancient carving done by a Greek sculptor, I saw her head. Dreamy and wilful, it is indeed the Oriental character. This Grecian artist, who perished many centuries ago, understood the nature of the great lovers of Asia, the profound and terrible passions of those queens, Balkis, Shamiram, the Marys of Magdala. . . .

Dreaming before this fragment of stone that remembered the glorious Cleopatra, I recalled the legend of Semiramis and the great king, Ara the Beautiful.

TOWARDS JERUSALEM

This legend says that Shamiram (Semiramis), intoxicated by the praises of their king, Ara the Beautiful, sung by the Armenian minstrels of Babylon, gave him her heart. She languished in her gardens among the sickly trees that sighed, like her, in the sands of the desert. She hated her austere palace and her little courtesans, thin and slight, and her artificial gardens that, like a mirage, made her thirst for the virgin woods of her own country, where, free and happy, she had been only a little princess.

How, then, could she resist the charm of the poems sung to her by the Armenian singers? They sang of their country of prairies watered by the Tigris and the Euphrates, and of the splendour of Ara the Beautiful, whose glory stretched from the Red Sea to the Black, and from the snows of Ararat to the desert of Shama. This king had been born from the embrace of the Sea with the Earth; the Sky was the witness of this love, sang the minstrels. A red reed rose from the red sea, from this red reed shot a flame, and from this flame rose an adolescent. His hair was of fire, and his eyes were two suns, and his soul was the sea.

Shamiram loved this king, Ara the Beautiful, and she sent her ambassadors to beg him to come to Babylon to honour her fêtes. But Ara refused this honour; he repulsed her love. The charms of the Queen of Babylon troubled him. His people would pay dearly for the intoxications their king might taste in the arms of such an enchantress. He dared not come to Babylon.

Shamiram had no hate, no anger, nor even resentment, against this king who haunted her dreams, but driven by the desire to see him, if only for one moment,

EGYPT

she declared war upon him. However, she threatened with torture and death any of her soldiers who should dare to injure one hair of his head.

Alas, in the ardour of battle, the error was made. Struck by an arrow, Ara the Beautiful fell. At the news of his death all the Armenians, old and young and even children, rose to avenge him with the blood of the conquerors.

The Babylonians, fearing for their lives, announced to the people that the king was not dead, but a hostage in their hands. And in order to save themselves until the queen should arrive at the head of new troops, they said that every evening Ara the Beautiful would show himself to his people.

Every evening, in fact, the king appeared at his window, acclaimed by throngs. Pale and beautiful, in his royal robes, he smiled gravely. Happy to see him every day, the Armenian people patiently awaited the arrival of the Queen of Babylon.

Shamiram, at the head of her second army, hastened across the deserts, to punish the murderer of the king whom she loved.

She appeared in her triumphal chariot. Proud and impassive, she advanced toward the palace of Ara the Beautiful. She entered the great throne-hall, where the body of the king lay stretched out upon the cushions. At that sight, Shamiram was no longer a queen. A desolate woman, a lover mad with sorrow, she threw herself upon the body of the king and covered his face with tears and kisses. Such great sorrow was sacred; the guards kissed their swords in sign of mourning, and retired to leave the queen alone with the dead.

TOWARDS JERUSALEM

In the morning, heralds announced to the Armenian people that their king, forced to lay his sceptre and his sword at the feet of a woman, had killed himself for pride ; that the Queen of Babylon was preparing his funeral as though he were her husband ; that her chariot would be draped in mourning, and that the only song of the conquerors would be the funeral chants for Ara the Beautiful. Touched by the tragic love of Shamiram, the Armenians made no resistance to their conquerors.

Thus does the Orient revere, even though she be an enemy, one of the great lovers of Asia. The Occident would make of her, undoubtedly, a hysterical and perverted creature, such as Oscar Wilde makes the young and chaste Salome.

But that fierce and poetic East is no longer in Egypt. I stood on the spot where the palace of Cleopatra had risen in a dream of beauty and passion. There remains of it nothing but an old hut. I entered it. An odour of onion and a close musty smell. An old Armenian lives there. She was crouched on a divan ; a white veil gathered into a head-band embroidered with pearls covered her hair.

“ I love to hear the whistling of the wind and the surge of the sea,” she said to me. “ Then I feel happy, thinking, ‘ I have a good fire and hot coffee, while many others are dying of cold.’ ”

This is what remains of Cleopatra, in the very place of her palace and her great loves !

The Arab quarter is the only picturesque part of Cairo. All the rest is European. Between these two quarters one finds a city of prostitutes, whose houses

EGYPT

are the first that Europeans build to civilize us. Here one sees old English women, in baby dresses, painted like clowns. They do a cake-walk, prancing ungracefully on awkward legs. All this seduction, they say, costs but a few cents to all passers-by.

This degradation of love, this trampling beneath muddy boots so much of charm, of beauty, of poetry, affected me even to tears. What human brutality could so defile the temples of the spirit, so cruelly use the hearts and bodies of women ? A profound nausea rose from the depths of my soul. In vain I remembered the cruelties of Asia, trying thus to school myself to endure this spectacle of the barbarity of Europe. True, we are cruel. But I recalled our great houses that offer their shelter to the oppressed and unfortunate, I remembered our women, queens in the houses of their husbands or in the courts of love. With what ceremonies, what offerings of poetry, of flowers, with what respectful and sincere homage, the men of Asia succeed at last in arriving as far as our singers, our reciters, our serpent-charmers, and how much more must they offer of devotion and ardour before they see the face of even our littlest flower in the garden of love's joys !

No, no ! I shuddered, trying to forget this glimpse of the incredible grossness and brutality of the civilized West. What culture, what beauty, what health could flow from a society which defiled the holiest temples, which felt only amusement or indifference before the sight of degraded womanhood ? I saw in the Occident a monster, where I had expected a god.

Only at midnight, in the light of the moon, would I go into the Sahara to gaze at the Sphinx. I had been

TOWARDS JERUSALEM

warned that during the day I would see upon her head English women in tweed coats, and on the summits of the pyramids American tourists peacefully enjoying sandwiches.

I saw the Sphinx ; she seemed to crouch there with eyes upon the horizon, mocking by her indifference the little peoples and civilizations that through thousands of years have fought out their little quarrels around her, even striking her with the balls from their cannon. What could those balls do to her, though they be those of Napoleon ? Her secrets, her mystery, only the Sahara knows.

But it seemed to me that I saw in her my East ; mystic, dreamy, sister of eternity, enduring with eyes fixed on far horizons through all the centuries in which the little western peoples rise and fall like gnats.

I saw also the pyramids. We entered one by a tiny door, and after following, bent double, a long narrow sandy corridor, we entered a funeral hall. The Arabian guides lighted up with torches the walls of sparkling black granite. I had hoped to see, majestic in its sarcophagus, the changeless case of flesh which had held the soul of a Pharaoh. But it was explained to me that, for the convenience of western tourists, the mummies had been moved to a museum.

Leaving the pyramids, we went then to see Pharaoh in the place to which they had removed him. After pointing out, in a showcase, a collection of the rarest butterflies of Africa, the guide showed me, in another glass box, a mummy. I read on a little card, " Rhamses II, called Sesostris Pharaoh." O Europe, with what grace you unveil the past of its mysteries !

EGYPT

Even thus coarsely ridiculed, Rhamses was beautiful and majestic. A grave face, browned by the balsams, an aquiline nose. At the corners of his imperious, wilful lips, a smile of disdain. On his haughty forehead a rebel lock of shining blue-black hair. One fine hand lifted, the other laid upon his heart as though he wished to hide it from profane eyes. . . .

O heart of Pharaoh ! Before the eyes that look on you now, you need no concealment ; they cannot see you.

It was thus in Egypt that I first met Europe. It is true that it was not great Europe, but an uncertain and Levantine Europe, mixed with an Asia Europeanized and burlesqued. Wounded and incredulous, I told myself that I saw here neither the true Asia nor the true Europe.

Until then I had imagined Europe as all my people imagine it. We knew it only by splendid photographs where all the houses, tall and luxurious, seemed to us palaces, where the pavement was of smooth marble, and each lantern that lighted the streets was a moon. We heard that in Europe all men were equal and free, and it was only for the general order and happiness that now and then they freely chose one of their number for a ruler. There, in Europe, a perfect justice perfumed the sky.

Half-gods, the men of the western countries knew everything, were able to do everything. They were ignorant of the tumult of the senses that enlaved us in our dreamy gardens among the fountains. Proud, they rivalled even the stars. Mounted on little winged sylphs, like our Soleiman upon his magic carpet, they

TOWARDS JERUSALEM

soared among the stars, their brothers. Imperious and warlike, they dreamed of conquering far-away planets, their future homes. And we were persuaded that one day we would see them go to the moon and come back with as much ease as they came from their distant countries into our dull and disenchanting corners of the earth.

The wives of these half-gods were as mysterious to us as the European fairies, of which our legends of the Crusades keep such enchanting traces. Blonde and slender, with eyes as pure as the sky, these women, these flowers of the snowy countries, wore proudly the golden helmet of their marvellous hair. Free as the wind, and scornful as the Amazons of ancient Caucasus, they treated with contempt their men, from among whom they chose now and then, for an hour or two, the most handsome for their queen-like care-free loves.

We did not doubt that this Europe of Titans and heroes created Jeanne d'Arcs and Napoleons as often as Ophelias and Marguerites. In comparison with their world we felt that ours was a clod of earth. During our great receptions the presence of the beautiful European women with naked shoulders filled us with timidity. Bold with our men, they were so mocking, so haughty toward us, whom they treated as slaves. When we spoke of Europeans our voices unconsciously became grave and respectful, as when one addresses a parent, and our humble praises of them were always mixed with blame for all that is Asiatic. How profane appeared to us the efforts of an Asiatic to imitate a European ! Was it possible to imitate a god, or to equal the sun ?

It was in Egypt that I first came in contact with Europe. But I was too dreamy ; the reality pierced

EGYPT

very slowly the veils of reverie which protected my soul. Far from my Persia and my Caucasus, I was drawn more closely to them by a profound nostalgia. And having set aside my pride and my prejudices against the dancers, I lost myself in the poetry of my dances. When with half-closed eyes, to the sound of the stringed instruments, I drew with my naked feet the arabesques of our dances upon the Persian carpets, I would forget that I was very far from the dear walls of our gardens. My dancing was also a mute but eloquent language by which I said to those who treated us with contempt that, although humble in our inferiority to Europeans, we nevertheless have a little grace and tenderness, and that even in our dreaminess there is splendour. In my illusion I thought that the watching demi-gods would mingle with their disdain for us also a little understanding and respect.

But the more I knew of these gods and their Europe, the more I withdrew within myself, burying jealously in my secret depths all that was sensitive and poetic. Thus I was wounded less.

Around me, too, I saw for the first time "civilized" Asia. Until then I had known only the Asia of the great patriarchal traditions. The world of Europeanized Asiatics was entirely unknown to me. This world, in contact with the vulgar Occident, unfortunately borrowed from it only its depravities, and among others, the revolting fashion of treating as animals the unhappy women who have not the fortune to be protected by father or husband. And in this attitude, where the European has a touch of the naïve and childlike even in his brutality, the Asiatic becomes simply hideous. This is because he comes from the midst of Orientals and

TOWARDS JERUSALEM

knows that respect for all women, even the most unhappy, is the noblest sentiment of mankind. In the true Orient, the most depraved man venerates instinctively in every woman the image of her who gave him birth. Therefore the Asiatic outrages his own soul in imitating the European who treats certain women as "fallen," and his brutality has the ruthlessness of the fanatic convert who desecrates the altars of his forsaken religion.

Thus in Cairo one evening I saw, with sick incredulous eyes, one of our most sacred dances degraded into a bestiality horrible and revolting. It was our poem of the mystery and pain of motherhood, which all true Asiatic men watch with reverence and humility, in the far-away corners of Asia where the destructive breath of the Occident has not yet penetrated. In this olden Asia which has kept the dance in its primitive purity, it represents maternity, the mysterious conception of life, the suffering and the joy with which a new soul is brought into the world. Could any man born of woman contemplate this most holy subject, expressed in an art so pure and so ritualistic as our eastern dance, with less than profound reverence? Had this been told me, I could not have believed it. Such is our Asiatic veneration of motherhood, that there are countries and tribes whose most binding oath is sworn upon the stomach, because it is from this sacred cup that humanity has issued.

But the spirit of the Occident had touched this holy dance, and it became the horrible *danse du ventre*, the *hoochie-koochie*. To me, a nauseating revelation of unsuspected depths of human bestiality, to others it was—amusing. I heard the lean Europeans chuckling, I

EGYPT

saw lascivious smiles upon even the lips of Asiatics, and I fled.

In my sad adventures in Egypt I was to meet often this type of civilized Asiatic, which the West calls "picturesque," and the more I clashed with it, the more I opened my sleeping eyes.

O my beautiful ignorance, which had made me love humanity as the most splendid flower in the beautiful garden of the Creator !

I was presented to X . . . Pasha, then newly appointed King of Albania. He was organizing a splendid fête for the anniversary of the Khedive's coronation. The Halim Palace, one of the most beautiful in Egypt, was opened for the festivities. A number of halls, draped in the different styles of the Orient, were set aside for me and the musicians who were to accompany my dances.

The Khediva was a Turkish princess. As a Mussulman, she could not mix with the European guests, and an entertainment was offered her separately, in the afternoon.

I entered, draped in several transparent veils. At the end of the long *salon*, draped in purple, blue, and rose, and lighted by latticed and curtained windows, I saw the Khediva. A suite of pretty Khanoums-Emires, Turkish and Arabian, dressed in white robes embroidered with gold, surrounded her divan. Of the Khediva, one saw only the sparkle of eyes beneath her veils.

In the respectful Asiatic manner, my musicians had turned their backs upon the Khediva, which obliged me to follow with my dance the breezes of their inspiration, a task indeed awkward for an Asiatic dancer whose ges-

TOWARDS JERUSALEM

tures are always followed by the music and not controlled by it.

After the dance, the Khediva called me to her and embraced me affectionately.

"They tell me that you come from very far," she said graciously.

"I come from Iran," I replied, installing myself upon the cushions to which she invited me with a gesture.

"But you are Circassian?"

"So be it if my Sultana wishes it. I am so called in the Turkish harems."

"Ah, you are then an Armenian?"

"It is as my Sultana has said."

"But why does one speak of the Armenians as Circassians in the Turkish harems?"

"Because, O my Sultana, the Circassians are Mussulmans. To love a Circassian is not a sin against Mohammed. But to love an Armenian is to love a Christian, a Giaour. Therefore in the harems the Armenians are called Circassians."

The Khediva smiled, and held out to me a little copper medal.

"It is for you to treasure as a remembrance of our Khediva," one of the Khanoum-Emires explained to me.

Shocked at the small splendour of this gift of copper, I tried to console myself by thinking that it had perhaps come to her from the treasures of some Pharaoh Cheops or Sesostris. In any case, I soon lost it.

The same evening all European Egypt crowded itself into the Halim Palace. After my dances I was presented to the European wife of the Khedive, formerly a cook in his palace. However, it was considered an honour to be presented to this European Khediva.

EGYPT

Sanctified by the crown, her pots and pans were forgotten.

Blonde and soft, like a pinkish paste, she was stretched out on a long chair, throwing flowers to her guests and calling everyone "thee" and "thou." Her vigorous laughter undulated her plump stomach; the fragments of her laugh scattered through all the halls and caused even the immobile negroes at the thresholds to smile.

Bewildered, I asked myself why, in their marriages with Europeans, our great rulers always prefer the cooks to the ladies. Is it because the servants, more naïve and spontaneous than their mistresses, are more nearly like the Asiatic women than are the great dames of Europe, filled with cold artifices of the heart and the spirit?

I was obliged to admit to myself that at the very sight of his monocle my heart became a cold wall against which the most passionate entreaties of an English gentleman broke in vain. Can this owl love? I asked myself in amazement.

What illegible hieroglyphics were the Englishmen and Americans in my hotel! Wrinkled like our eunuchs, with eyes as cold as those of fishes, they stretched out in their chairs, pipes in mouths. Their large feet were raised nonchalantly near the noses of their wives. Thin and corseted to the chin, these wives held themselves correctly erect on their hard chairs. I became dizzy in trying to imagine how these people expressed to each other their loves.

Do the long stiff arms of these men know how to embrace? Do their teeth sometimes unloosen to abandon their pipes, and do ardent words come from those severe mouths? Do those gloomy eyes ever light

TOWARDS JERUSALEM

with the fires of joy, love, or anger ? And their wives, those ladies so stiff, so grave, and so shamelessly naked in their evening gowns, do they ever feel a longing for natural grace and suppleness ?

I had been escorted to the fête of the Khedive by an Armenian Khan of Constantinople, then a diplomat at Cairo. He was an old man, very grave beneath his red fez. Small but sturdy, with a long grey beard, this venerable man inspired in me a sentiment of extreme and timid modesty. Therefore, after having danced with naked feet for the Khediva, I had put on my stockings and hidden my throat to dance for the Khedive.

"My daughter," said the Khan, "show everyone by your dances that the virtue of Armenian women is their modesty."

I danced, therefore, not only with my eyes closed and my mouth compressed, but even without breathing, fearing that to breathe would give my body a suggestion of voluptuousness.

The Khan was delighted.

"Continue to live proudly, my child," he said to me. "Refuse all the dinners and suppers that will be offered you, and return at once to your rooms."

We lived in the same hotel, and it was to this admirable protector that I had been recommended by my friends in Constantinople. He was watching over me like a father, and I was deeply touched by his care. Dinners and suppers ? No dragon could have frightened me more than those words.

Having bowed before the European wife of the Khedive, then, I directed my steps toward the doors.

EGYPT

Between two rows of guests we advanced like a nuptial procession. The Khan led it. Majestic as a ship, he walked before me with a slow and even step ; I followed him humbly, my head bowed beneath the curious eyes of the assembly. Three Albanians followed carrying my flowers, and behind them a little negro bore on a tray my tambourine and cymbals.

The Khan was disappearing into the shadows of the gardens when a hand stopped me beneath the arcades. It was the Pasha. His eyes lifted toward the ceiling, he sighed rapturously. He spoke to me of my snowy mountains, of the black diamonds of my eyes. Alas, was that all that he remembered of my dance-poems ? I blushed, I paled, my heart beat. In my confusion I forgot for an instant the venerable Khan who waited outside with my negro and my carriage.

Then I hurried blindly onward, half detained by the Pasha's hand on my arm and his voice that poured a flood of compliments into my ears. We reached the gates, the Pasha trembling, I astounded at his audacity.

A servant said to us, " His Excellency has departed, very much enraged."

" So much the better," said the Pasha, and turning to me he said, " My house is vast, and it is yours. Allah be praised if he leads us to Paradise there."

" Allah would not be so cruel, Pasha. After entering your house I could hide my shame only in the abysses of hell. I am Christian, Pasha. Allow me to go."

" There is neither Mahomet nor Christ, my beautiful dove. There is only one true religion, and that is love."

" Your words are useless, Pasha. I beg you, a carriage. I am a Christian."

I finally reached my hotel, trembling. I had hardly

TOWARDS JERUSALEM

taken off my cloak when a servant came, inviting me to drink a cup of tea with the Khan. It was midnight, but I could only obey my venerable protector. I hastened to his suite. Buried in an arm-chair, silent and motionless, the noble Khan had the air of a god of vengeance.

"Khan," I said timidly, "I made you wait. I have no excuse to offer, but pardon me in the name of Christ, I beg you."

"Pardon you?" he said after a long silence. "You know not even the respect due to my grey beard. I waited at the doors like a eunuch while you lent your ears to the impious flatteries of a Mussulman, of a Turk." There were tears in his voice.

"O Khan!" I wept. "May the earth open beneath my feet and may hell swallow me. How could I treat you as a eunuch, I who am so obedient to you, so humble?" And I respectfully kissed his hand. Two tears fell from my eyes upon it.

"Well," he sighed, "may God pardon you if pardon is possible."

I could not speak for sobs, and again kissed his hand.

"We are in Egypt, my daughter," he said. "Egypt is Europe. And in Europe all customs are different from ours, and it is the men who kiss the hands of the women."

"I respect my elders too much to allow myself to follow such a custom," I said, intending to flatter him.

"I am not so old as you think, my daughter," he replied, irritated. "I am only sixty years old, and in Europe that is like thirty years with us."

I did not know.

He kissed my hand. I was confused. This custom seemed to me very humiliating for an old man. He

EGYPT

rose and began to walk back and forth. I installed myself comfortably upon a divan. He was about to lecture me again on morals. These lectures consisted in teaching me that evil spirits dress in seductive robes all the vices of the world, of which the chief is art.

"Your feet are set upon a downward path, my daughter," he sighed. "You will soon be changed from an honest woman to an artist. Your fall is inevitable. You are young, you are alone, you dance. . . . One sees your face, your naked feet. . . . Corruption awaits you. I see it."

Troubled and unhappy, I asked him what was this corruption. It was, he said, the love of the rich, pearls, diamonds, magnificent apartments.

"Never, never, dear Khan! I swear to you by heaven and all the angels, never will I love a rich man. Besides, by nature I rather incline toward the poor ones."

"O unfortunate child, that is more terrible still," he answered. "The poor will not love you any better than the rich. Tired of your love, they will one day leave you quite alone, leave you to die beneath the walls of some public garden in the cruel cities of Europe. I see clearly your future, O my daughter!—the damp cellars, the cold garrets, hunger, filth, rags . . . O unhappy girl!"

Desolate and terrified, I began to weep.

"Be comforted," he said. "In Egypt you are not alone, no one will harm you. I watch over you, because I love you, as you know."

"I also, I venerate you with all my soul, dear Khan. You will not abandon me to hunger and rags, will you?"

"Never, my pigeon. Never, my dove."

TOWARDS JERUSALEM

But the words he had spoken continued to blow through my spirit like the bleak wind of the desert. Alone outside the walls of all the world's gardens, how could I escape the miseries he had prophetically foreseen? I continued to weep, and from the depths of my soul I cried to him, "Oh, tell me, how can I die? O my father, I want to die before my fall!"

"Poor child," he said, holding my head against his breast. "Listen to me. I know that you esteem me and that you follow all my counsels. Listen to me, then. I offer you my love and protection, will you accept them? You shall have all of my life that remains, and when I die I will leave you all my fortune. You will be married then (I suppose) to an honest man, and you will grow old an honest woman. Will you, my little dove?"

This conclusion to his paternal lectures was to me an earthquake. What? This Armenian patriarch? Was this, then, a noble father of my race, this monster transformed by Europe? O Eternal Father!

Covering my face with my hands I left him without a word. Reaching my room, I threw myself on a divan and wept until dawn.

"Celestial Father, Divine Protector! I do not wish to voyage any more. I do not want to see the glorious cities of Europe, nor the Indies, nor Japan! I fear the old men, all the elders of the world. O God! O Heaven! O Christ! Why is Thy curse laid on me? Why hast thou led me forth from my country, from Thine own Eden?"

At dawn I fell asleep, all exhausted with sobs. I was awakened by a servant who brought a little package. It was a beautiful ring, which the Khan had sent me.

EGYPT

His card said that he had gone to Alexandria in order not to be a witness of my inevitable ruin.

So I remained all alone in Cairo. I had no one for a guide.

That evening I received the visit of a Bey, also an Armenian and a Turkish diplomat. He was a giant, tall and blond. He had been presented to me at the fête in the Halim Palace as the best friend of the Pasha. He invited me to dinner with a party of friends at his house the following evening. "The Pasha has invited us to bring you later to supper at the palace," he said. Honoured by this double invitation, and eager to forget my unhappiness in conversation with the noble society of Egypt, I consented.

The following day, then, I made myself beautiful. My face, pale and saddened by the Khan's sacrilege, regained a little of its serenity. My white veils bordered with silver gave me a candid air, and I felt that thus I would inspire the respect of the personages I was to meet.

The Bey was announced; he awaited me in his carriage. I entered it, and we drove away. We crossed all Cairo, we left the city behind us, and went straight forward into the desert.

"Your house is indeed far, my Bey," I said to him.

"Yes, I live in the remote suburbs of Cairo."

The carriage stopped at tall gates. In the darkness I saw only a few palm trees. Beyond the palms the contours of a great palace could hardly be distinguished. No light in the windows.

"Your house has the appearance of a morgue," I

TOWARDS JERUSALEM

said, laughing. "Are you leading me here to assassinate me?"

Two footmen assisted us to dismount from the carriage.

"Why are the windows not lighted?" the Bey roared at them in a furious voice.

"But His Excellency himself commanded that——" His Excellency drowned their words in a violent flood of mixed Arabic and Turkish.

"This Bey is indeed not a very gentle character," I thought.

"Enter," he commanded me. I obeyed immediately.

We came from the darkness into a sumptuous hall. Above, high walls ornamented with ancient armour; below, a stairway draped with damask, leading downward.

"Descend," the Bey said, with an imperious gesture toward these steps.

I hesitated. Without knowing why, I felt my heart beating painfully. "But, O Bey, do you not prefer to dine upstairs? Underground rooms make me sad."

"My friends are waiting for us below," he said in Armenian. "Do not make me ridiculous before my servants."

The sound of my own tongue made me docile. The traditional submission to the man, master of the household, completely submerged my will. Such is the power of custom.

I descended and found myself in a little Turkish room without doors or windows, completely draped with red stuffs of Damascus. Along the walls a number of divans. On little tables encrusted with mother-of-pearl, a cold dinner set out.

EGYPT

"But where are your friends?"

"Do you think I am so stupid as to spoil the pleasure of having you alone in my house?" he said laughing, taking off his cloak.

"Christ and all the Prophets!"

Useless to remember all the burlesque scenes that the Bey made me witness. He lost all self-control. His blue eyes became black. He was in turn purple and pale, in turn amiable, brutal, sentimental, furious. Sometimes I was his little dove, his flower, his angel of Paradise; again, howling with rage, he called me probably wounding names, of whose meaning I was ignorant.

"I understand," he said. "You must be paid in advance."

He drew from his fingers two enormous rings of diamonds and placed them before me. I leaned against the wall, weeping bitterly.

"All the Satans of Hell! What is it you want, then?" And he hurled against the walls all the cups and bottles, even the tables themselves. Then he turned to me. Without having tasted the wines, he appeared intoxicated. I froze before this giant whose face was contracted with anger and desire. Thus for the first time I found myself confronting the degrading brutality which the West has taught the East to call love.

"When a woman wounds such sincere love, one takes her by force," he said in a smothered voice.

"Very well, O Bey," I replied in a calm and decided tone. "I am helpless. But know that to-morrow morning I shall be found dead on my divan, and that all Cairo and the East shall know why."

I really wished to kill myself. When one is young

TOWARDS JERUSALEM

one plays so easily with life. My threat to the Bey was sincere. The disgust he had inspired in me spread to cover the whole world, and my indignation was profound.

Many expressions passed over the Bey's face, while I stood before him proud and indifferent in my cold hatred. At last he groaned, clenched his teeth, and controlled himself. A few minutes went by in silence. With a broken gesture he picked up his little cap and gave me a weary look. He had the air of a sick person.

At the submissive aspect of this giant, a sort of compassion came over me. What a bizarre thing is the human heart! Not only did I pardon him in an instant all the suffering he had made me undergo during two hours, but I felt a desire to comfort and protect him.

"My poor Bey," I said, putting my hands on his shoulders.

Surprised by the tenderness of my voice, he looked at me in astonishment. Something gentle and yielding replaced for an instant the hardness in his eyes. For that second his eyes were those of a man of the East, who knows and reveres the divinity of love.

Happily, at that instant some one opened the door. I collected myself, drew my veils around me, and left.

"Admit," he said, helping me from the carriage at my hotel, "that a less scrupulous man than I would simply have drugged your wine. But you were with a gentleman."

I was astounded.

Just at midnight I entered the palace of the Pasha.

EGYPT

In a great hall lighted by innumerable lanterns a society composed of all races and all religions, perfumed, glittering with pearls and diamonds, greeted me with shouts of laughter and applause.

Far from being flattered by such a warm greeting, I disliked it, and halted on the threshold, unwilling to advance. The Pasha ran to me, grasping my hand, and thanked me for enabling him to win a large bet.

I understood nothing, but the mystery was soon explained. I learned that I had been the subject of a wager between the Bey and the Pasha. The Bey had arrived an hour earlier, claiming that he had won, and upholding his claim with a wealth of detail, but his aspect had so contradicted his words that the company had laughed at him, and he had left in angry confusion. My heart overflowing with indignation, I made every effort to restrain my tears.

A Russian approached me to shelter me from the jokes that were wounding my ears, then not accustomed to the crudities of European language, where one uses unconcernedly words that one does not hear in my country.

"Do not be so unhappy," this Russian begged me. The Russians, who are half Asiatic, always understand me. "These are really innocent *bon mots*. You must accustom yourself to this European gallantry of Egypt. Here even the Asiatics respect only those Oriental women who have never leaped the walls of their harems."

He continued: "The Levantine society in Egypt is composed mostly of adventurers of all kinds." And he presented to me successively all the guests of the Pasha, accompanying each name with the most comical

TOWARDS JERUSALEM

remarks. There were nothing but "counts" and "barons." He presented me to three blonde princesses, Abdullah, Ibrahim, and Ismail, telling me that they were all singers in the European cabarets of Morocco and Algiers before their rise to thrones.

Among all the people who surrounded and frightened me in Egypt, there was one whom I sincerely esteemed and whose memory remains dear to me. He was an Italian, a Neapolitan count. He lived in a pretty little villa drowned beneath a sea of palm-fronds, and occupied himself with journalism. A widower, father of a child, he was good, wise, and charming. His goodness, which covered all the world, spread itself over me. He was troubled for my future.

"But what are your prospects?" he asked me constantly.

This was an embarrassing question; my prospects were vague even to myself. On days when the sun was hidden and when my spirit ached with an indefinite sadness, I replied, "I shall go straight from here to Jerusalem to shut myself for ever in a convent; I have a letter to our Patriarch of Jerusalem."

On days when the glowing sun kindled in me a desire for lands still warmer than Egypt I told him, "I shall go to the Indies; I have letters to the Maharajahs of Haiderabad and of Mador."

"But what will you do there, all alone?" he asked me anxiously.

"I shall dance in their palaces, and I shall visit one by one all the princes of the Himalayas. Some day perhaps I shall marry one of those Rajahs. I shall have a house of marble upon a lake covered with water-lilies.

EGYPT

I shall have little elephants which I shall raise to hunt the lions and the tigers."

"And if none of these Rajahs wish to marry you ? "

"So much the worse for them. I will enter the caste of the bayadères, and dance in the temples and in the bazaars."

"But when you grow old ? "

"I shall gain my bread as a beggar on the street corners."

"Kind Lord ! " cried the good Neapolitan.

But I was sincere. Though so newly come from the chrysalis, I felt my wings beginning to expand. I cannot say that my poor freedom intoxicated me, but the dream of Freedom still had that power. And the bazaars of Asia would please me as much as our palaces. When I grew old, begging my bread under the beautiful sun did not appear to me at all as a dishonourable end for a once-brilliant bayadère.

To save me from such adventures, this charming gentleman offered me his name, his home and all that he possessed ; a heart full of tenderness and a peaceful life in his château on the outskirts of Naples.

"An old château ! . . . The Adriatic ! . . . Serenades ! . . ." I dreamed. Perhaps it would be as beautiful as the palaces of the Rajahs on the banks of the Ganges. This charming man would be my faithful husband, and his child, without my having to undergo the pain of child-birth, would call me mother. I was touched to tears, and this future seemed to be as beautiful as a legend.

"Yes, yes, I must marry him," I decided, and nestling beside him, "Tell me," I said, "when I am your

TOWARDS JERUSALEM

wife, we shall go just the same to China and Japan, is it not so? There I shall dance for all the great Mandarins, all the Haus, all the Maos, and you, you will defend me against all the diplomats of those countries."

"Oh no, my beautiful!" he protested, shocked. "I am not at all the man for such a rôle. The love of an Italian is absolute; it surrenders all, it demands all. I shall be for you all your joys, all your art, all your life!" And he embraced me passionately. My thoughts immediately took another turn.

"To bury myself with this man, under the roof of an old house in the country. Husband! . . . Slippers! . . . Spectacles! . . . Journals! . . . O horror!"

And my handsome Rajahs with haughty profiles, those bronze-coloured, proud Rajahs, so humble at the feet of the bayadère! And my palanquins, my little elephants, my tigers, my lions! My palace of marble on the water-lily lake!

"No, no," I said, disengaging myself firmly from the arms of the good Neapolitan. "I like better to continue my vagabond life." And I said farewell to the charming count, farewell to Naples and the old château in which I would have been the imprisoned châtelaine.

So ended this dream. But it was beautiful.

Returning to my hotel, I determined to go at once to the Indies. I had given my last dance at Alexandria, nothing held me in Egypt, and I was weary of it. I was looking at my costumes and jewels, choosing those I would take with me, when two Englishmen were announced. They invited me to dance for one year in England and in America.

EGYPT

To dance for one whole year, and every day ! Such a pleasure appeared to me incredible and impossible. Moreover, I could not imagine their motive in suggesting it.

“ No,” I told them. “ However, I shall perhaps go some day to dance before your kings and princes.”

“ America has no kings,” one of the Englishmen explained to me. “ As for us, we have only one king and very few princes. I know only one, the Prince of Wales.”

“ But that makes only two evenings in all. Decidedly that is too little for which to undertake so long a journey.”

“ Ah, but you will have two hundred large music-halls, and we will give you fifty thousand francs for the year.”

The splendour of the music-halls was unknown to me. The fifty thousand francs did not at all impress me either. I was completely ignorant of the value of all the money of the world.

“ What, then, are music-halls ? ”

The Englishmen described them to me. A stage, and lights, and many people ; applause, flowers. Still, these appeared to me pale in comparison with the Indies.

My friends arrived just as I was finally and emphatically refusing this offer.

“ Are you crazy ? ” they cried. “ Think ! London, Paris, New York ! Fame, fortune, fifty thousand francs ! ”

I replied sadly, “ But the Indies with all my Rajahs ! And Jerusalem, and my Patriarch ! ”

“ It is madness to renounce such an opportunity.”

TOWARDS JERUSALEM

my friends insisted. "Forget these vague and uncertain adventures. Go to London; go to shine in the civilized countries."

With a sorrowful heart I finally signed a large paper written in English, of which I did not understand one word. My friends assured me that everything was written there in the most honest manner. The two Englishmen placed their names beside mine, and confided to me this large paper. And that evening, during a supper which my friends gave to celebrate this stroke of fortune, I learned that I was now a star, an artist of the music-halls. This was incomprehensible to me. To be a star! How beautiful! But my very soul shuddered at that word "artist."

At the end of the banquet, toward dawn, I went back to my rooms very much oppressed, ill. I felt vaguely that I had sold to those two Englishmen that which was dearest to me beneath the sun, my liberty. I looked at the enigmatic words to which I had signed my name. The hateful paper burned my hands. Tear it up! But, no. I had been warned that if any harm came to that paper I would be put in prison, because such papers are sacred in the civilized countries.

Without undressing, I lay down, but sleep fled from my eyelids.

Occident! England! America! Celestial Father, what should I do all alone in that world? How would I live in a country where the sun, I had been told, resembled a disk of ice, and the stars are hidden, and the sky weeps without ceasing, where the moon herself wears always veils of fog?

And for this miserable fate, I had for ever ceased to be Khanoum, I had become an artist!

EGYPT

The word made me shudder. Under that name, in the Orient, one spoke of the unfortunate women brought from the Occident by slave-merchants. No one remembered ever to have seen a performance given by these artists, because on the very day of their arrival they were bought for a sum of gold and disappeared into private harems.

“O Heaven !” I prayed, lifting my wet eyes toward the ceiling, “do not let me become one of those unhappy little ones ! Shame to me, and shame to Thee, O Divine Father, if Thou allowest one who clings to the hem of Thy garments to fall so low ! Do I not love everywhere, good or bad, the work of Thy hands ? Can Thy Heavenly Wisdom condemn me to fall into the Dark Abyss ? No, no, for that would be Thy fault, not mine. I am only a feeble candle in Thy hands, a grain of dust beneath Thy feet !”

In the morning, after a cold bath, I was able to calm myself a little.

“Courage,” I thought. “The four walls of a garden are no longer around me, the patriarchs no longer watch over me. Then deeds, not lamentations ! Destiny guides me toward new horizons. I must submit. Farewell to my dreams, farewell to my sun ! I am now become an artist.”

From that moment I became independent, that is to say, thrown to the mercy of events.

Independence ! Proud word, created to reduce the proudest to slavery.

I left Egypt. The warm wind of the Sahara was gilding with yellow dust the low shores of the Mediterranean.

TOWARDS JERUSALEM

I left Asia. It seemed to me that I was leaving a planet dear to me, going to another planet unknown. Far away, cold and arid, this new world terrified me. I felt confusedly that there I would be as alien as an animal of the days before the Flood, left stranded among the new inhabitants of the world.

My heart, my poor frozen heart, broke into a thousand pieces. Crushed by an impalpable burden, I touched my shoulders to be sure that the sky was not resting upon them its heavy arches.

The bridge which joined the ship with the land of Egypt was lifting. It seemed to me that all the cords which united me to the Orient were being cut.

O Asia, O my sun ! I leave you, perhaps for ever. Will I be able to live without you ? To what does this huge ship, this sea-monster, carry me away ?

And the Europeans, enclosed with me upon this ship, how ugly they are ! These blonde people with unnatural, colourless skins, who smile at me, how I detest them ! One of them wishes to speak to me, O Heaven !

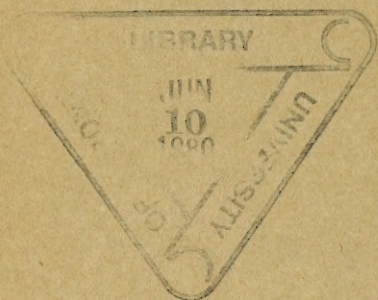
I fled into my cabin and began to weep, my face sunk into the cushions of my bed. As in the agony of the drowning, all the countries, all the houses that I had known, all the living and dead faces, all that was dear and terrible to me, rushed before my eyes from I know not where. Laughing and weeping, I wiped them away with my burning hands, but they returned. Among the others, a face with an aureole of luminous rays rested upon me two sorrowful eyes. It leaned toward me, and I felt a kiss on my forehead. My mother, my adorable mother ! At this very hour, without doubt, she was praying for me, far, far away among the mountains of my Caucasus.

EGYPT

Mother, where am I going ? Oh come with me ; I am afraid ! Eternal Saviour, God of Kindness, God of Mercy, what horrors dost Thou reserve for me in the unknown lands of the Occident ? I am alone. O Great God, watch over me, protect me !







ROBARTS LIBRARY
DUE DATE

MAY 20 1990

CT
1908
062
A313
1922

Ohanian, Armen
The dancer of Shamanka

